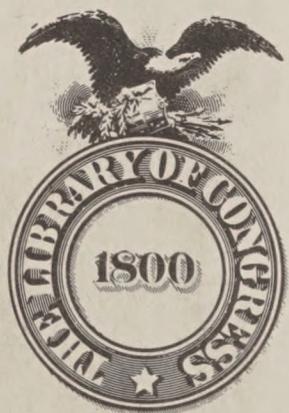


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LITTLE EPPIE AND OTHER TALES.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. Little Eppie.....	5
II. The Basket of Strawberries.....	33
III. The Italian Organ Boy.....	44
IV. The Crowning.....	54
V. Jenny's Trial and Triumph.....	60
VI. The Child Martyr of Antioch.....	70
VII. Nellie's Apricot Tree.....	75
VIII. Emma and Eliza.....	86
IX. Esther, the Jewish Maiden.....	95
X. Johnny's Fate.....	104
XI. The Worst Boy in School.....	114
XII. The Worst Girl in School.....	139
XIII. The Shipwreck.....	159

	PAGE
XIV. No Time like Present Time.....	168
XV. Lending a Half-Crown.....	203
XVI. Story of a Violet.....	208
XVII. Believing, but not Understanding.....	215

LITTLE EPPIE.

I.

LITTLE EPPIE.

(Abridged from “Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe.”)

SILAS MARNER was a weaver, who lived in the early part of this century, near a lonely gravel pit, some distance from the village of Raveloe. He had only one object in life, and that was to add to the hoard of guineas which was hidden under some loose bricks in the floor. His only pleasure was to take them out when his day's work at the loom was done, and his door made fast, and count them over. It was only fifteen years since he had come to Raveloe, as a young man, but these fifteen years had made him old. He avoided his neighbours and they avoided him, for they felt a kind of superstitious dread of the si-

lent, self-absorbed man, who had come no one knew whence, and worked week-days and Sundays at his loom. This dread was increased by certain fits to which he was liable. When they came on, he did not fall, but became rigid and unconscious, nor did he know, when he came to himself, that anything unusual had happened to him. Silas had not always been a lonely miser; in his youth he had had many friends. One man in particular he had loved, as David loved Jonathan, and this friend had been false to him. He committed a theft, and contrived that the blame should fall on Silas. The religious community to which they belonged held that such matters ought to be referred to the judgment of Heaven, by drawing lots. This was done, and the lots declared Silas guilty! He was unused to independent thought, and it never occurred to him that the will of Heaven could not be discovered thus. He grew desperate, and lost all faith in God or man. Soon the woman whom he was to have married became the wife of his false friend.

Then Silas left his native town and went to Raveloe, where no one knew his past history. Gradually he grew to be the miser we have described. Nobody in this world but himself knew that he was the same Silas Marner who had once loved his fellow with a tender love, and trusted in an unseen goodness. Even to himself that past experience had become dim.

But about Christmas, in the fifteenth year of his Raveloe life, another change happened. His money was stolen, and the loss nearly broke his heart. As he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and moaned very low,—not as one who seeks to be heard. His trouble softened the hearts of his neighbours, and they lost their dread of him; but he was too wretched to understand or respond to their sympathy.

On the New Year's Eve after Marner's loss, a wretched woman was walking along the snow-covered Raveloe lanes with a child in her arms. The poor creature had taken opium, to deaden the feeling of cold and

weariness, and at last, overcome by drowsiness, she sank down into the snow. She did not feel that the bed was cold, and did not heed whether the child would wake and cry for her. As the mother sank into a heavy sleep, the child's blue eyes opened wide on the cold starlight, and it rolled from her arms into the snow. Suddenly its eyes were caught by a bright glancing light on the white ground, and it was immediately absorbed in watching the bright living thing running towards it, yet never arriving. That bright living thing must be caught; and in an instant the child had slipped on all-fours, and held out one little hand to catch the gleam. But the gleam would not be caught in that way, and now the head was held up to see where the cunning gleam came from. It came from a very bright place; and the little one, rising on its legs, toddled through the snow, the old grimy shawl in which it was wrapped trailing behind it, and the queer little bonnet dangling at its back—toddled on to the open door of Silas Marner's cot-

tage, and right up to the warm hearth, where there was a bright fire of logs and sticks, which had thoroughly warmed the old sack (Silas' greatcoat) spread out on the bricks to dry. The little one, accustomed to be left to itself for long hours without notice from its mother, squatted down on the sack, and spread its tiny hands towards the blaze, in perfect contentment, gurgling and making many inarticulate communications to itself, like a new-hatched gosling beginning to find itself comfortable. But presently the warmth had a lulling effect, and the little golden head sank down on the old sack, and the blue eyes were veiled by their delicate half-transparent lids.

But where was Silas while this stranger-visitor had come to his hearth? He was in the cottage, but he did not see the child. Since he had lost his money he had contracted the habit of opening his door and looking out from time to time, as if he thought that his money might be somehow coming back to him. This evening he had

stood and gazed for a long while. As he was going to shut the door he was seized by one of his fits, and stood with wide but sightless eyes holding open the door, powerless to resist either the good or evil which might enter.

When he came to himself he felt chilled and faint, but was not aware what had happened to him. He seated himself in his fire-side chair, and was stooping to push the logs on the hearth together, when, to his blurred, short-sighted vision, it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold!—his own gold—brought back to him! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but, instead of the hard coin, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement Silas fell on his knees, and bent his head low to examine the marvel; it was a sleeping child—a round, fair thing,

with soft yellow rings all over its head. Could this be his little sister come back to him in a dream,—his little sister whom he had carried about in his arms for a year before she died, when he was a small boy without shoes or stockings? That was the first thought that darted across Silas' blank wonderment. *Was it a dream?* He rose to his feet again, and, throwing sticks on to the fire, raised a flame; but the flame did not disperse the vision—it only lit up more distinctly the little round form of the child and its shabby clothing. It was very much like his little sister. Silas sank into his chair overpowered. How and when had the child come in without his knowledge? He had never been beyond the door. But along with that question was a vision of his old home. He had a dreamy feeling that this child was somehow a message come to him from that far-off-life; it stirred fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe—old quiverings of tenderness—old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life.

But there was a cry on the hearth; the child had awaked, and Marner stooped to lift it on his knee. It clung round his neck, and burst louder and louder into that mingling of inarticulate cries with "mammy," by which little children express the bewilderment of waking. Silas pressed it to him, and almost unconsciously uttered sounds of hushing tenderness, while he bethought himself that some of his porridge, which had got cool by the dying fire, would do to feed the child with if it were only warmed up a little.

He had plenty to do through the next hour. The porridge, sweetened with some dry brown sugar from an old store which he had refrained from using for himself, stopped the cries of the little one, and made her lift her blue eyes with a wide quiet gaze at Silas as he put the spoon into her mouth. Presently she slipped from his knee and began to toddle about, but with a pretty stagger that made Silas jump up and follow her lest she should fall against anything that would hurt her. But she only fell in a sitting posture on the

ground, and began to pull at her boots, looking up at him with a crying face, as if the boots hurt her. He took her on his knee again, but it was some time before it occurred to Silas' dull bachelor mind that the wet boots were the grievance, pressing on her warm ankles. He got them off with difficulty, and baby was at once happily occupied with the primary mystery of her own toes, inviting Silas, with much chuckling, to consider the mystery too. But the wet boots had at last suggested to Silas that the child had been walking on the snow. He raised the child in his arms and went to the door. Bending forward, he could just see the marks which the little feet had made on the snow, and he followed their track. "Mammy!" the little one cried again and again, stretching itself forward so as almost to escape from Silas's arms, before he himself was aware that before him lay a woman,—frozen to death.

A few hours afterwards, Silas sat by his hearth lulling the child. She was perfectly quiet now, but not asleep,—only soothed by

sweet porridge and warmth into that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we feel before some quiet majesty in earth or sky—before a steady-glowing planet, or full-flowered eglantine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway. The blue eyes fixed themselves on the weaver's queer face, which was bent low down to look at them, while the small hand began to pull Marner's withered cheek with loving disfigurement.

"You'll take the child to the parish to-morrow?" asked a neighbour.

"Who says so?" said Marner, sharply.
"Will they make me take her?"

"Why, you wouldn't like to keep her, would you—an old bachelor like you?"

"Till anybody shows they've a right to take her away from me," said Marner. "It's a lone thing,—and I'm a lone thing. My money's gone I don't know where—and this is come from I don't know where. I know nothing—I'm partly mazed."

Silas Marner's determination to keep the tramp's child was the subject of much talk in the village. Notable mothers and lazy mothers were equally interested in conjecturing how a lone man would manage with a two-year-old child on his hands, and were equally ready with their suggestions; the notable chiefly telling him what he had better do, and the lazy ones being emphatic in telling him what he would never be able to do. Among the former, Dolly Winthrop was the one whose neighbourly offices were the most acceptable to Marner, for they were rendered without any show of bustling instruction. Silas had asked her what he should do about getting some clothes for the child.

“Eh, Master Marner,” said Dolly, “there's no call to buy no more nor a pair o' shoes; for I've got the little petticoats as my Aaron wore five years ago, and it's ill spending money on them baby clothes, for the child 'ull grow like grass i' May, bless it—that it will.”

And the same day Dolly brought her bun-

dle, and displayed to Marner, one by one, the tiny garments in their due order of succession, most of them patched and darned, but clean and neat as fresh spring herbs. This was the introduction to a great ceremony with soap and water, from which baby came out in new beauty, and sat on Dolly's knee, handling her toes, and chuckling, and patting her palms together with an air of having made several discoveries about herself, which she communicated by alternate sounds of "gug-gug-gug" and "mammy." The "mammy" was not a cry of need or uneasiness. Baby had been used to utter it without expecting either tender sound or touch to follow.

"Anybody 'ud think the angils in heaven couldn't be prettier," said Dolly, rubbing the golden curls and kissing them. "And to think of its being covered with them dirty rags—and the poor mother froze to death; but there's them as took care of it, and brought it to your door, Master Marner. The door was open, and it walked in over the snow, like as if it had been a little

starved robin. Didn't you say the door was open?"

"Yes," said Silas, meditatively. "Yes—the door was open. The money's gone I don't know where, and this is come from I don't know where."

He had not mentioned to any one his unconsciousness of the child's entrance, shrinking from questions which might lead to the fact he himself suspected—namely, that he had been in one of his trances.

"Ah," said Dolly, with soothing gravity, "it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest—one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how nor where. We may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do arter all—the big things come and go wi' no striving o' our'n—they do, that they do; and I think you're in the right on it to keep the little 'un, Master Marner, seeing as it's been sent to you. You'll happen to be a bit moithered with it while it's so little; but I'll come and see to it for you."

“Thank you—kindly,” said Silas, hesitating a little. “I’ll be glad if you’ll tell me things. But,” he added, uneasily, leaning forward to look at baby with some jealousy, as she was resting her head against Dolly’s arm, and eyeing him contentedly from a distance—“but I want to do things for it myself, else it may get fond o’ somebody else, and not fond o’ me. I’ve been used to fending for myself in the house—I can learn, I can learn.”

“Eh, to be sure,” said Dolly, gently. “I’ve seen men as are wonderful handy wi’ children. You see this goes first, next the skin,” she proceeded, taking up the little shirt and putting it on.

“Yes,” said Marner, bringing his eyes very close, whereupon baby seized his head with both her small arms, and put her lips against his face with purring noises.

“See there,” said Dolly, with a woman’s tender tact, “she’s fondest o’ you. She wants to go o’ your lap, I’ll be bound. Go, then; take her, Master Marner; you can put

the things on, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you."

Marner took her on his lap, trembling with an emotion mysterious to himself, at something unknown dawning on his life. Thought and feeling were so confused within him, that if he had tried to give them utterance he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child. He took the garments from Dolly, and put them on under her teaching, interrupted, of course, by baby's gymnastics.

"There, then! Why, you take to it quite easy, Master Marner," said Dolly; "but what shall you do when you're forced to sit in your loom? For she'll get busier and mischievouser every day—she will, bless her. It's lucky as you've got that high hearth i'stead of a grate, for that keeps the fire more out of her reach; but if you've got anything as can be split or broke, or as is fit to cut her fingers off, she'll be at it—and it is but right you should know."

Silas meditated a little while in some perplexity. "I'll tie her to the leg o' the loom," he said at last—"tie her with a good long strip o' something."

"Well, mayhap that'll do, as it's a little girl, for they're easier persuaded to sit i' one place nor the lads. Eh, if it wasn't a sin to my lads to wish 'em made different, bless 'em, I should ha' been glad for one of 'em to be a little girl ; and to think as I could ha' taught her to scour, and mend, and the knitting, and everything. But I can teach 'em this little 'un when she gets old enough."

"But she'll be *my* little 'un," said Marner, rather hastily, "she'll be nobody else's."

"No, to be sure ; you'll have a right to her if you're a father to her, and bring her up according. But," added Dolly, "you must bring her up like christened folks' children, and take her to church,—that's what you must do, Master Marner, if you'd do the right thing by the orphan child."

Marner's face flushed under a new anxiety. His mind was too busy trying to under-

stand Dolly for him to think of answering her.

“And it’s my belief,” she went on, “as the poor little creatur has never been christened, that the parson should be spoke to. For if the child ever went anyways wrong, and you hadn’t done your part by it, Master Marner,—’noculation, and everything to save it from harm,—it ’ud be a thorn i’ your bed for ever, o’ this side the grave; and I can’t think as it ’ud be easy lying down for any one when they’d got to another world, if they hadn’t done their part by the helpless children as come wi’out their own asking.”

Dolly was disposed to be silent now, for she had spoken from the depths of her own simple belief, and was much concerned to know whether her words would produce the desired effect on Silas. He was puzzled, for Dolly’s word “christened” conveyed no distinct meaning to him. He had only heard of baptism, and only seen the baptism of grown up men and women. “What is it as you mean by ‘christened?’” he said at last tim-

idly. “ Won’t folks be good to her without it ? ”

“ Dear, dear ! Master Marner,” said Dolly, with gentle distress and compassion, “ had you never no father nor mother as taught you to say your prayers, and as there’s good words and good things to keep us from harm ? ”

“ Yes,” said Silas, in a low voice ; “ I know a deal about that—used to, used to ; but your ways are different. My country was a good way off.” He paused, then added more decidedly, “ but I want to do everything as can be done for the child. And whatever’s right for it i’ this country, and you think ’ull do it good, I’ll act according, if you’ll tell me.”

“ Well, then, Master Marner,” said Dolly, “ you must fix on a name for it, because it must have a name giv’ it when it’s christened.”

“ My mother’s name was Hephzibah,” said Silas, “ and my little sister was named after her.”

“ Eh, that’s a hard name,” said Dolly ; “ I partly think it isn’t a christened name.”

“It’s a Bible name,” said Silas, old ideas recurring.

“Then I’ve no call to speak again’ it,” said Dolly, “but you see I’m no scholard. But it was awk’ard calling your little sister by such a hard name, when you’d got nothing big to say, like—wasn’t it?”

“We called her Eppie,” said Silas.

“Well, if it was noways wrong to shorten the name, it ’ud be a deal handier. And so I’ll go now, and speak about the christening afore dark; and I wish you the best o’ luck, and it’s my belief as it’ll come to you, if you do what’s right by the orphelin child.”

Baby *was* christened; and on this occasion Silas appeared for the first time within the church, and shared in the observances held sacred by his neighbours. He had no distinct idea about the baptism and the church-going, except that Dolly had said it was for the good of the child; and in this way, as the weeks grew to months, the child created fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk. Unlike

the gold which needed nothing, which was hidden away from the daylight, was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones,—Eppie was a creature of ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds and living movements; making trial of everything with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked on her. The gold had led his thoughts to nothing beyond itself, but Eppie forced them onward and carried them far away, to the new things that would come with the coming years, when Eppie would have learned to understand how her father Silas cared for her. The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded to all things except the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, re-awakening his senses with her fresh life, and warming him into joy because *she* had joy.

And when the sunshine grew strong and lasting, so that the buttercups were thick

in the meadows, Silas might be seen strolling out to carry Eppie beyond the stone-pits, to where the flowers grew, till they reached some bank where he could sit down, while Eppie toddled to pluck the flowers, and make remarks to the winged things that murmured happily above the bright petals, calling “Dad-dad’s” attention continually by bringing him the flowers. Then she would turn her ear to some sudden bird-note, and Silas learned to please her by making signs of hushed stillness, that they might listen for the note to come again; so that when it came she set up her small back and laughed with gurgling triumph.

As the child’s life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied in a narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness.

By the time Eppie was three years old, she began to devise ingenious ways of being troublesome, which found much exercise for Silas’ watchfulness and patience. Sorely was he puzzled on such occasions by the in-

compatible demands of love. Dolly Winthrop told him punishment was good for Eppie.

“ You might shut her up once i’ the coal hole,” said Dolly, meditatively. “ That’s what I did wi’ my Aaron; for I could never bear to smack him. But I put it upon your conscience, Master Marner, as there’s one of ‘em you must choose,—ayther smacking or the coal hole,—else she’ll get so masterful, there’ll be no holding her.”

Silas was impressed with the truth of this last remark; but his force of mind failed, not only because it was painful to him to hurt Eppie, but because he trembled at a moment’s contention with her lest she should love him the less for it. It was clear that Eppie must lead father Silas a pretty dance on any fine morning when circumstances favoured mischief.

For example: He had wisely chosen a broad strip of linen as a means of fastening her to his loom when he was busy; it was long enough to allow of her reaching the bed

and sitting down on it, but not long enough for her to attempt any dangerous climbing. One bright summer's morning Silas had been more engrossed than usual in "setting up" a new piece of work, an occasion on which his scissors were in requisition. These scissors had been carefully kept out of Eppie's reach, but the click of them had had a peculiar attraction for her ear. Silas had seated himself in his loom, and the noise of weaving had begun ; but he had left his scissors on a ledge which Eppie's arm was long enough to reach ; and now, like a small mouse, she stole quietly from her corner, secured the scissors, and toddled to the bed again, setting up her back as a mode of concealing the fact. Having cut the linen strip in a jagged but effectual manner, in two moments she had run out at the open door, where the sunshine was inviting her, while poor Silas believed her to be a better child than usual. It was not until he happened to need his scissors that the terrible fact burst upon him : Eppie had run out by herself,—had perhaps fallen into the stone-

pit. Silas rushed out, calling “Eppie!” and ran eagerly about, looking into the dry holes into which she might have fallen, and then gazing with questioning dread at the smooth surface of the water in the bottom of the pit. The cold drops stood on his brow. How long had she been out! There was one hope, that she had crept through the stile, and got into the fields where he habitually took her to stroll. The first meadow was searched in vain; and he got over the stile into the next field, looking with dying hope towards a small pond, which was now reduced to its summer shallowness, so as to leave a wide margin of mud. Here, however, sat Eppie, discoursing cheerfully to her own small boot, which she was using as a bucket to convey the water into a deep hoof mark, while her little naked foot was planted comfortably on a cushion of olive-green mud.

Silas, overcome with joy at finding his treasure again, could do nothing but snatch her up and cover her with half-sobbing kisses. It was not until he had carried her home,

and had begun to think of the necessary washing, that he recollects the need that he should punish Eppie, and "make her remember." The idea that she might run away again and come to harm, gave him unusual resolution, and for the first time, he determined to try the coal hole—a small closet near the hearth.

"Naughty, naughty Eppie," he suddenly began, holding her on his knee and pointing to her muddy feet and clothes; "naughty Eppie to cut with the scissors, and run away. Eppie must go into the coal hole for being naughty. Daddy must put her in the coal hole."

He half expected that this would be enough, and that Eppie would begin to cry. But, instead of that, she began to shake herself on his knee, as if the proposition opened a pleasing novelty. Seeing that he must proceed to extremities, he put her into the coal hole, and held the door closed, with a trembling sense that he was using a strong measure. For a moment there was silence, but

then came a little cry, “Opy, opy !” and Silas let her out again, saying, “Now, Eppie ‘ull never be naughty again, else she must go in the coal hole—a black, naughty place.”

The weaving must stand still a long while this morning, for now Eppie must be washed, and have clean clothes on ; but it was to be hoped that this punishment would have a lasting effect, and save time in future.

In half an hour she was clean again, and Silas having turned his back to see what he could do with the linen band, threw it down again, with the reflection that Eppie would be good without fastening for the rest of the morning. He turned round again, and was going to place her in her little chair near the loom, when she peeped out at him with black face and hands again, and said, “Eppie in de toal hole !”

This failure shook Silas’ belief in the efficacy of punishment. “She’d take it all for fun,” he observed to Dolly, “if I didn’t hurt her, and that I can’t do, Mrs. Winthrop. If she makes me a bit o’ trouble, I can bear it.

And she's got no tricks but what she'll grow out of."

So Eppie was reared without punishment. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined with downy patience, and also in the world that lay beyond the stone hut, she knew nothing of frowns and denials.

Silas took her with him in most of his journeys to the farm-houses, and little curly-headed Eppie, the weaver's child, became an object of interest to many. No child was afraid of approaching Silas when Eppie was near him; there was no repulsion around him now, either for young or old; for the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world. There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world—from men and women with parental looks and tones, to the red lady-birds and the round pebbles.

Silas' disposition to hoard had been utterly crushed at the very first by the loss of his long-stored gold. And now something

had come to replace his hoard which gave a growing purpose to the earnings, drawing his hope and joy continually onward beyond the money.

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the City of Destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. Yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them gently forth towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward, and the hand may be a little child's.

II.

THE BASKET OF STRAWBERRIES.

ONE Wednesday afternoon, at the close of school, a little girl might have been seen running towards her home as fast as her feet could carry her. Hot and breathless with haste, she bounded into the parlour, shouting “Abby, Abby,” so loud, that the house rang like a trumpet.

“What’s the matter?”

“I want you to go strawberrying with me, to-night. Now don’t put on that long face, and say you can’t: you always say so. You haven’t been with me once this summer, and if you only knew how much I want you to go, I am sure you would.”

Abby did not answer at once. Etta could not brook the disappointment of her plan, and impatient with fear, she seized her sister’s arm with a gentle shake, exclaiming,

“Don’t stop to think, get ready, and we’ll go.”

“Etta, I should love dearly to go, both for your sake and my own ; but how can I ? Before we can get back, father and the boys will be up, tired and hungry, and somebody must be here to get their supper, and take care of the milk when it comes in.”

“Oh, I can fix that ; I arranged it all before, because it is your constant bug-bear. We will set the table now ; we can get everything ready but the tea, and you can put the tea-pot on the hearth with the tea in it, and they will know enough to put the water to it when they come in ; the milk they can strain and set up, and we will take care of the pails, and other dishes, when we come home. Now haven’t I fixed it ?” demanded she, with a very triumphant air.

“You do seem to have made it all easy, Etta,” she replied, with a smile a little sad, for she saw how impossible it would be to make the child see it in any other light.

“But I think it will seem anything but

easy and pleasant to our dear father, when he finds no one here to welcome or wait on him ; the fire down, and no Abby to get his tea. We should be so late home, too, as to break up our evening, his only quiet time at home, and that you know he never likes. I am sorry, my dear sister, but I don't think I can go to-night."

"But just for this once, only once, Abby, and our berries, which father loves so much, will make up to him for the loss of other things."

"I will go with you, on Saturday, when school does not keep, and it shall be just as early after dinner as you please, and you shall stay as long as you please."

"No, I want you to go to-night ; you say nobody can tell what will happen on the morrow, and just as likely as not it will rain on Saturday, and we can't go : so come now, just for once ; I know father won't care."

"No, dear, not to-night ; I do not feel that it would be right, and I should be very unhappy."

“ Dear me ! what a fuss you do make about nothing. You stay mewed up here all day, and never will go anywhere I want you to. Come, go.”

Abby shook her head, but did not trust herself to speak.

“ Humph ! you are just as obstinate and selfish as you can be. I shall go alone, and if I get ever so many you won’t have one.” With these words she snatched up her bonnet and basket, and flung out of the house, slamming the door violently behind her.

Abby was bitterly grieved ; large hot tears dropped like rain from her eyes, and covering her face, she wept as she had never wept but once before,—three years before—as she knelt beside her mother’s dying bed, to receive her last blessing, and with it the solemn charge, “ Abby, I give Etta to you ; be a mother to her.” Her all but breaking heart accepted the charge, and held the fulfilment thereof as a solemn vow.

Abby was now sixteen, and Etta four years younger ; but her mother’s loss, and the re-

sponsibilities which had thence fallen upon her, had given her a maturity of character far beyond her years. With a wise and steady hand, and a heart full of love and sympathy, she had watched over and guided her little sister, winning in return her confidence and fond affection. Etta was indeed sometimes selfish, sometimes unreasonable ; but she had never before given way to such a burst of passion.

“ Oh, my mother ! my mother ! ” sobbed out the distressed girl, as she sank, heart-broken upon the floor. Did her mother hear her ? Perhaps not ; but there was One who did. Raised, as by an unseen hand, she went to her chamber and fell upon her knees before Him who always comforts the comfortless. Her grief and trouble were too deep for many words ; but her very soul went out, and up to God for pity and help : and they came. The dark cloud parted, and the peace which faith brings, fell softly in upon the troubled spirit ; the sorrow which had overwhelmed her rolled quietly and obediently away, at the word of

Jesus, as he gently whispered, “Peace, be still.” Her tears were dried, and if she was not quite as gladsome as before, she went forth to her labours and responsibilities, sustained by a trust far more lovely and precious.

As Etta flung herself away from Abby, and from home, a fierce tumult swelled in her own bosom; all sorts of angry and wicked charges and purposes were, on the one hand, raised against her sister, while on the other, the loud and earnest remonstrances of conscience made her tremble. She tried to shut her ear, and stifle its voice, but in spite of herself, its solemn admonitions now and then thrilled through and shook her, like the voice of God: and then she would redouble her efforts to persuade herself of the selfishness and unkindness of her sister.

Thus wrought upon from within, she was hurrying down the street and over the meadow, utterly blind and deaf to the world around her. The neighbours passed her, but she did not heed them; little birds she loved, sang to her their songs of love, but she

did not hear them ; sweet wild flowers at her step, looked up and smiled, but she did not see them. Selfishness and anger darkened her heart, and shut out, even from her senses, the beauty and sweetness and joy of earth.

She leaped over the fence, and sat down among clusters red and ripe ; she picked rapidly, almost spitefully, but her thoughts were not of them. The sun-light fell softly in a golden shower over her ; but its influence did not reach her heart ; the evening wind breathed cool around her, but it did not temper the furnace fires of passion which burned within, and glowed upon her cheek. Her basket was presently filled, and throwing her sun-bonnet across her arm, she started homeward ; she walked slowly along, but the softening, soothing influences of the hour were lost upon her.

She found her sister at the window, watching for her return, and the supper-table waiting for her evening meal. Without any remark, she drew her chair to Abby's side, and sat down with her basket in her lap.

“ How beautiful your berries are,” said

Abby, in the sweetest, kindest tone, as she reached out her hand to take one. Etta rudely turned away and began eating them. Tears filled her sister's eyes again, and her heart was grieved, but she said nothing.

Etta went on eating, until her sister became anxious lest she should be sick in consequence. Revolving the matter a few moments, she arose, brought a plate from the closet, and sitting down by Etta, said, "Shall I help you pick over a few berries, for father?"

Etta vouchsafed no reply, but moved still further off. Abby waited a moment, and then said tenderly: "Dear Etta, if you eat more to-night I am sure you will be sick. Put up the rest until to-morrow, and take some supper now; do, dear."

But pride and selfishness were having their own way in Etta's heart, and she was ready to brave all consequences for their gratification. She finished her berries to the last one, put away her basket and went up to her room without speaking one word to her sister.

Abby sat up later than usual, waiting for her father, who had been called away. Not far from ten o'clock, she heard a strange noise from her room. She listened: it came again, the cry of anguish. She flew up stairs, and found her sister in her night-gown rolling upon the floor, in great distress.

"What is the matter, dear?" she inquired, as she knelt beside her.

"Oh, Abby, I have got such a dreadful pain, and I have been such a wicked sister to you."

"Never mind me, now, dearest," she replied, as she lifted her in her arms to the bed. But the movement so increased the pain that Etta writhed in agony. All simple remedies failed of relief, while her sufferings evidently increased. In her alarm, Abby sent for the physician, who, to her unspeakable joy, arrived at the same time with her father.

"What's the matter with my little girl now?" asked the kind doctor, as he entered the room. But one moment's glance at the

agony of the child was the only answer he needed. During the long night the three stood over that anguished bed, working with a devotion and energy which only the conflict between life and death can inspire. As the morning dawned, their hopes rose tremblingly above their fears, for the paroxysms were relaxing. Though pale as death, the child lay without motion, almost without breath. With unwearying care and love, Abby watched the pulses ebbing slowly back to life.

Just as the sun was setting Etta opened, for the first time, her eyes. Abby sat by her couch, with her head on the pillow, close to her own. Strange as it all seemed, the troubled dream soon took shape in her mind, and the realities of the night drew up before her. Putting her arm around her sister's neck, as painful tears coursed down her cheek, she said: "Dear Abby, can you forgive me?"

"Yes, love, with all my heart."

"And do you think God will ever?"

Etta's heart was truly broken; selfishness, pride, and anger, as hateful in their nature,

and deadly in their consequences, stood revealed to her, and she turned away from them with unfeigned sorrow and abhorrence.

She recovered from her sickness, but its impress was left as painfully upon her physical, as savingly upon her moral, nature. It was eighty years before the grave closed over her honoured head, but to the last her sensitive system utterly denied her the pleasant fruit whose one excess had so imperilled its existence.

Meekly she received the rebuke, and thankfully recorded that mercy which spared her in her wickedness, and dealt with her as with a child. Long since she entered upon her heavenly rest. Who among the living will venture to slight the warnings of her experience, left by her own lips, as an example to those who should come after ?

III.

THE ITALIAN ORGAN BOY.

THE harbour of Genoa rested in calmness under the burning summer sun. As the light breeze now and then swept across the water, each little wave seemed formed of purple and gold; and the city, with its palaces, its overhanging mountains, and its mirror-like bay, well deserved its old name of "Genoa the Magnificent."

But who is that dark-eyed boy, whose bare feet and tattered clothes contrast so strangely with the scene around? It is poor Carlo Frugoni. Six months ago Carlo had a home among those hills where grapes festoon the rocky terraces, and the olive-tree yields its fatness to each sheltered nook. But now the wide world must be Carlo's home, for death had laid both his parents in the grave:

the vines and the olives were no longer his ; so, leading his little sister by one hand, while the other supported a strange, old-fashioned barrel-organ, he crept down into the busy city.

There were buying and selling, walking and visiting, merry faces and sad ones too ; but no one seemed to notice poor Carlo, or the foot-sore little Maria, except, indeed, when he tried to earn a morsel of food by playing and singing a soft Italian air before the great houses of the principal street. A servant might so far notice him as to call out in an angry voice that he had better be off as quickly as possible. Nothing was to be got among the rich, so Carlo turned to the narrow lanes in hope of better success. But here each poor family had little boys and girls, with eyes as dark and mouths as hungry as those of the wanderers, and thought it better to keep their scanty store of bread for the next meal instead of sharing it with the orphans. At length the children found their way to the quay, where a ship was just load-

ing with fruit for England. Carlo had often heard his father say that the English were very rich, and often generous too ; so he resolved to ask that gentleman who stood watching the sailors as they lifted in boxes and barrels, and whom he guessed to be the captain, if he would be so kind as to give him something to buy bread for the little Maria. The captain did not like beggars, and said he worked hard himself, and gave nothing to idle people ; but that if he wished to earn some money by helping to roll those barrels on board, he might do so. Carlo was delighted with the offer ; and finding a shady place on the quay where he could leave his sister in safety, he ran off to work.

When evening came, the captain praised Carlo for his diligence, and told him that if he had no better work, there was an empty berth for a cabin-boy on board his vessel. Tears rushed into the boy's eyes, and in broken words he told his true, sad story. His parents dead—his dear little sister—how could he leave her ? No, no, he must stay

and work for her; or if that could not be found, they must starve together. The captain was a rough man, who neither wanted babies nor barrel-organs on board his schooner; but then there was a peaceful cottage home in England, where a gentle lady lived, who could speak in the same soft tones as Carlo, and had left the sunny land of Italy to be his wife; and there was a little fair-haired boy, whose dark eyes were so like Maria's, that, brushing away a rising tear, he told Carlo that if he wished to see the world, he might work his passage to London, and that they would stow away Maria and the music into some corner.

The vessel sailed shortly after, and Carlo soon became a general favourite: and the sailors were often glad to pass away an idle hour by listening to a merry tune, or watching the gambols of the orphan girl. But a terrible trial awaited Carlo. He had never learned to look above earth for a friend; and now that his parents were gone, his love centred in Maria, and every spare moment was

spent in attending to her wants. Just as the vessel entered the Bay of Biscay the child took ill, and before they reached sight of the white cliffs of England, the poor little girl was buried beneath the waves. And Carlo's heart seemed buried too. The sound of that heavy gurgling plunge as the sheeted form of his lovely little sister found its way to an ocean bed, never left his ears; the sight of those closing waves so quietly folding over the buried child, was always present to his eye; while, alas! his soul was not brightened by the hope of that world where there is no sea. The sailors were often alarmed at seeing him moodily hanging over the bulwarks, as if he longed to try the depth of those cold, dark waters; and though his work was done, his manner was reserved, and his replies sullen. As soon as the schooner reached London, and unloaded her cargo, Carlo went away, no one knew where. The barrel-organ was gone also, but neither captain nor crew missed the smallest trifle that belonged to them.

Summer was giving place to early autumn,

when Carlo wandered to a fishing village on the southern coast of England. His restless spirit had led him away from that great city where he had for some weeks gained a scanty livelihood by the aid of his organ. He wanted to look once more at that loved yet dreaded sea, where his little sister slept. He had walked far that day, and sat down to rest on some steps which led to a pretty white cottage in the middle of a garden. More to cheer himself than in hope of attracting attention, he sang some words which he had learned among the grape-gatherers of his native hills, and he was not a little surprised when the garden gate at the top of the steps opened, and a little boy about three years old, with his pinafore full of flowers, advancing towards him, said, "Freddy Manly will give his bright penny to buy poor boy bread." A lady now appeared from behind the trees, holding a child. One glance at the poor organ boy, as he expressed his thanks in broken English, assured her that he had come from her native Italy.

She hastened back to the cottage, and brought out some food for the stranger, adding sixpence to her child's gift, and then, with a kind feeling, withdrew while the half-starved boy ate the tempting supper.

What a rapid flight thought has! Those few moments brought to Carlo's mind a rushing flood of things gone by. That baby's eyes, they were just like Maria's; and then the name, Manly—that was the captain's. And surely that lady's voice reminded him of home. All this might be the case, but he could and would keep his secret.

Nor was memory less active at the other side of the garden-wall, where the lady bent over her flowers. She thought of her beautiful native land, too long the home of ignorance; she thought of the blessed Book which had made her free; and looking up for a blessing, she resolved to offer the same precious gift to her little countryman. So, drawing a small Italian Testament from her pocket, she again appeared at the top of the steps, just as Carlo was about to retire.

“Little boy,” she said, in Italian, “you are far away from friends; if you can read, here is a book which will tell you about a friend always near, even about the good Saviour, who died that poor sinners like you and me, through believing on him, might reach the happy home above.”

Carlo listened with wonder, and turning over the leaves, almost on the last page a line caught his attention: it was this, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it.” That was enough to insure the book a hearty reception; he took it with many thanks, and pressed it to his bosom.

Day after day passed, and though Carlo never called again at that cottage door, still some strong attraction seemed to bind him to the spot. He wandered up and down among the country people, who often rewarded his music with a crust of bread or a drink of milk; but his leisure moments were devoted to the study of the Testament.

One morning he was passing at a short distance from the garden where he had first

seen his little friend Freddy. The gate opened, and the child hurried down the steps all alone. Drawn by some bright flowers which grew in the field, and not seeing that a railway train was quickly drawing nigh, he crossed the railway lines which lay between. A minute more, and he would have been crushed to death. His mother ran in search of the child—saw all, but could render no help, and her wild cry was lost in the noise of the puffing, shrieking engine. Carlo rushed to the spot, and, stepping on the line, in one moment flung the child on the green side-bank, and then threw himself violently backwards to escape the wheels of the train. The engine, with its long line of carriages, passed ; and the mother, first clasping her frightened but unhurt child to her breast, hurried to the spot where his noble deliverer still lay. The boy was stunned—she thought he was dead. He was removed to the cottage, and, after some hours had elapsed, they found that a few bruises were the only injuries he had received in his heroic effort to save life. We need

not tell what cares the captain's wife bestowed on him, or how the captain himself, on coming down from London to say farewell to his family before setting out on another voyage, found his lost cabin-boy. During his abode in that happy English home, Carlo began to mourn for sin with a deep and godly sorrow, and to know and love that Saviour who had laid down his life for his enemies, that they through him might be brought nigh to God.

When the captain left home for sea, Carlo went with him, and was his companion for many a voyage; and on the wide ocean, from the same Italian Testament, he learned the truth which in the midst of England's sabbaths and her Bibles he had neglected and despised. There was music in Carlo's soul now, singing and gladness, for his loving heart had found an undying friend; and each member of the captain's family, as well as the poor Italian boy, felt the meaning of those words of the Lord Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

IV.

THE CROWNING.

IT was a warm sunny spring morning when Robert Campbell went, for the first time, to a pleasant, white school-house, which stood on a slight elevation, from which could be seen the church steeples of the three cities of Boston, Chelsea, and Charlestown. There was also Bunker Hill monument, standing out in its simple dignity, calling to every one to keep in mind the glorious deeds of our fathers. There were the tall masts of the ships resting in the harbour, the smoke of the busy little ferry boats, and many other things which would interest the eye of anybody who had not become accustomed to them. It was very new to Robert, who had lately removed from Nova Scotia with his parents and sister. In fact, he thought he should never get tired of look-

ing at the little panorama, which was so new and delightful to him. So he stood enjoying the prospect from the steps of the school-house till the bell should summon the scholars to their different rooms. Suddenly there stepped up to him a tall boy, who laid his hand on the nice straw hat that Robert wore, and said, with mock solemnity: "I crown you." No sooner was this ceremony performed than several more boys of the same appearance did the same thing, until Robert in his amazement, had been "crowned" rather more than was agreeable. Just then, the bell striking, Robert said, as he ran up the stairs: "Since you have crowned me, boys, I'll try and be king."

In the course of the morning Robert found himself placed in the same class with the tall boys whom he had encountered in the morning. He could as yet form no idea of their scholarship; but thought, if their manners were any indication of their intelligence, he should see rather a stupid set of boys in his class. During the morning it was announced by the

master that at the close of the year there would be awarded a prize to the person who should stand at the head of his class. He also remarked that the prize could only be gained by the most patient and persevering efforts. "Ah!" thought Robby to himself; "here is a chance to see what I can do. If hard work and good behaviour amount to anything, I'll be king of my class."

As Robert was on his way home, at noon, he felt a hand, from some one behind him, upon his shoulder. Another crowning, thought Robert; but, looking around, he saw that it was his uncle, James Campbell, who lived in a large house, near the school-house.

"Well, Robert," said he; "did you get crowned this morning?"

"Yes, Uncle James; but what does it mean?"

"It means that you had on a new hat, and that they followed the usual course when it was discovered."

"But why don't the teachers put a stop to such ceremonies?" said Robert.

“For nearly the same reason that police officers cannot always prevent mischief, or always find it out when it is done. I suppose that as long as there are boys in the world there will always be some who are rude and impolite. I suppose I hardly need say, Robby, that the best course with such people is to notice them as little as possible.”

“Well, Uncle James, I have about made up my mind that as long as they have given me a crowning, I will try and deserve it, by just keeping a good distance ahead of them in my studies.”

“Very well,” said his uncle; “it will do you no harm to try, at any rate.”

Here they separated, Robby having come to his own door.

I suppose that if I were to attempt to tell you how Robert succeeded each day in keeping his new resolution, it would make a very, very long story. If any of us should try to write all that he did or tried to do every day for a year it would make a very large book. So I shall not be able to tell you just

how many times Robert failed and how many times he was successful. He began at the foot of his class and kept on steadily rising each day, till at last he stood, bravely and honestly, at the head. To be sure, there came, every now and then, some hard, vexatious days; but as Robert kept up a patient heart, they were passed over and conquered. I suppose it is just the same with boys as with men,—if they work patiently over one hard thing it will give them strength to do whatever may come next.

I am now going to tell you of what happened one summer afternoon, nearly a year after Robert entered the school. In the large hall of the school building was gathered a large crowd of people; they were the fathers, and mothers, and friends of the scholars who belonged to the school, and had assembled together at the closing exhibition of the year. After a great deal of good speaking, singing, and recitation had been performed by the scholars, there was one exercise which was extremely interesting. One of the Commit-

tee arose and remarked that, according to the custom of the school, they should then give a prize to one scholar from each class who had most distinguished himself for excellence in scholarship and behaviour. Every eye was turned to obtain a glimpse of those who had so happily won these honours for themselves. As they rose in their seats at the announcement of their names, no one stood with a lighter heart than did Robert Campbell; and when he received the prize, with the words, "Won by hard, patient study—not by a few brilliant efforts," he felt the pleasure that all feel when, after patient toil, comes the success.

"I think I must try all through life, and see what 'trying' will do for me," said Robert, when he reached home.

"I see that you are determined to keep on winning crowns, Robby," said Uncle James.

"You must try," said his mother, in a quiet voice, "for another crown—for 'the crown of life which fadeth not away.'"

V.

JENNY'S TRIAL AND TRIUMPH.

“I WOULD not put up with such treatment as you get from that woman, Jenny—no, not if she were my own mother. If she had me to deal with she should get as much as she gave,” said Martha, with a shake of her closed hand.

“But would that be right, Martha? Aunt Fanny is my father’s sister, and is doing her best, I suppose, to make him comfortable. My slow ways vex her; but by and by I may succeed in pleasing her, for, indeed I am trying.”

“That’s just where you and I differ. Please her! I would be very sorry,” cried Martha, sharply. “What right has she to order you about, as if you were a servant?”

“She does not, I think, mean to be unkind

to me ; but oh, she is not my own dear——" and while Jenny's voice refused to utter the loved name, her blue eyes looked down through a cloud of tears.

This bit of talk, and a great deal more, passed between two young friends on their homeward way from school one fine autumn afternoon. Jenny Brown and Martha Smith had been friends since they were very little children. They had played with the same toys, read the same stories, learned the same lessons ; and yet Martha's fiery eye was the sad tell-tale of a temper which was passionate though affectionate, while Jenny's sunny smile spoke only of gentleness and love. Still, as we may gather from the angry remarks of her young companion, Jenny had some home trials. For two years she had been learning, by sad experience, what it is to grow up motherless. She could well remember the dreadful day of the funeral, and how sure she felt that she never would be happy again. But time heals every sorrow except those that sin makes ; and Jenny had enjoyed some happy days even

since her mother's death. She attended school as usual, and was always ready to meet her father with a smile when he came home from the saw-mill where he worked in the village. But a daughter's smile, though very pleasant, is not the only thing necessary to make a house comfortable ; and, as Jenny was rather given to dreaming than doing, her three little brothers' elbows and toes had a decided tendency to peep out, and her father had almost forgotten how a nice dinner tasted. The neighbours shook their heads and said they pitied the poor man, while Jenny was sure she worked very hard, and wondered why things would go wrong. Such was the state of affairs when an unmarried sister of Mr. Brown's came to pay them a visit, and her quick glance and ready hand wrought so wonderful a change in the house that she was asked to make it her home for the present.

At first Jenny was glad : aunt Fanny's presence took such a load of undone work from her shoulders ; but she soon found that her aunt's tongue and temper were as quick

as her eye, and that it was not always easy to give soft answers to rough questions. However, Jenny remembered that she had often heard her mother say, "It always takes two to make a quarrel;" and so she made up her mind neither to play first nor second in so ugly a game. But she knew more than that—she could recollect how her mother used to pray with her every evening, asking the Saviour to make her meek and lowly like himself, that, as she grew up, she might have a woman's best adorning—the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. These words, hardly understood at the time, came back to Jenny's mind now.

It is not always easy to turn good advice and prayers into good practice, and to be pleasant when other people are very provoking. But these moments of trial are just the moments for triumph, too.

The morning on which our story begins had been a very trying one to poor Jenny. As a rule, her aunt found fault with almost everything she did; and, perhaps, after having given her some piece of work, snatched it from her

hands, saying that it was no use trying to teach such an unhandy creature. Bitter words are among the bitterest of bitter things; but when they touch some one we love they are almost unbearable. Jenny had been up early to put the housework in as forward a state as possible before setting out for school, and felt sure that she should win her aunt's praise for once, when suddenly an unforeseen storm burst on her head.

"What's all this noise about?" cried aunt Fanny, showing an angry face; "I would like to know if you call that sweeping a room —just knocking your brush against the furniture, and then leaving all the dust where it was? What did your mother intend to make you? A fine lady, like herself, of course."

"Aunt Fanny, I won't bear it; how dare you speak so of my dear, dear mother?" was just coming to Jenny's lips; but the first two words only made their escape from that door, and the rest of the sentence, and many more unspoken ones, rushed down her cheeks, in a flood of scalding tears.

“And now let me tell you,” added her aunt, “that this day is your last at school. I talked to your father about it last night, and told him what an idle, good-for-nothing girl you were. He agrees with me, now that we keep no servant, that your proper place is at home, learning to wash, and bake, and mend, instead of filling your head with that fine nonsense out of books. There, now be off, and tell the mistress what I said.” This was a sad blow to Jenny, for she loved school, and in particular since the arrival of her aunt, had considered the hours spent there the happiest of the day. Was there no hope that her father might change his mind on this matter? She feared not—he was a stern man, and his word a law. Still, she could not help wishing that the message had not come to her through her aunt: even a father’s voice would have softened its severity: now, however, nothing remained but to obey.

With swollen eyes and aching head she trod the familiar green lane that led to the school-house, often lifting up a little prayer that God

would forgive the sin of her heart and enable her to do what was right. She found the teacher alone, for it was early yet, and delivered her aunt's message in as soft a way as was consistent with truth. Her kind friend understood all, and putting her arm lovingly round Jenny's waist, spoke so wisely and soothingly about the happiness of submission to the will of our heavenly Father, and of meek obedience to those he has set over us, that half the trouble seemed gone before the girls took their places and school began. Several times during the day she recalled her teacher's words, and how she had hinted that earthly, as well as heavenly blessings, were promised to those who obey, and to the meek, adding that, by God's grace, Jenny might learn the lesson and get the reward. Cheered by such a prospect, the good-bye to school was not so bad as it might have been. All would have gone well had not Martha Smith overtaken her on the road and poured out those hard speeches with which our story began—words that wakened up Jenny's angry

feelings again, and made it very hard for her either to feel right or do right that evening.

Day after day of trial followed. Work as she might, no word of praise rewarded Jenny's toil, while the slightest mistake was followed by hard words and blows. It was hard to toil unthanked from morn till night, but worse still to be described to her father as a lazy, useless girl. But the real trial of the conflict was within. There she had to battle with discontent, anger, and revenge, and sometimes self-love and pride. Any one of these foes would have been too strong for poor Jenny, if a stout sword had not been wielded by a mightier arm than her own. What was this sword? Sometimes from its gleaming sides flashed these words, "Put on meekness;" or, "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ;" or, "He will beautify the meek with salvation;" and so the stout sword generally got the victory. It was the "sword of the Spirit."

Months had come and gone, bringing many changes without doors, but few in Jenny's

home. Her warm-hearted though foolish friend, Martha, had gone to learn dress-making, in London ; her mother's grave had been whitened with the snow and melted into green for the third time, and Jenny herself had grown into a tall, slight girl. Suddenly, when things were going on worse than ever, her aunt was attacked with fever, and helpless as a child, was wholly at the mercy of those whose love she had never tried to win. The children were lodged at a distance : a death-like silence took the place of the usual noise and bustle of that cottage. Neighbours crept in and out, often saying very unkind things even while doing kind ones. The doctor paid his daily visit, but declared that the constant attention of a nurse could do more for the patient than his best medicine. And now Jenny was able to bring into active service the lessons of diligence and industry which she had been learning in so hard a school. With untiring patience she waited on her aunt, met her wants, and strictly carried out the orders of the doctor, while she almost won-

dered at herself to find that duty could become so easy ; and her father certainly found out that she was neither idle nor useless.

The pleasure of returning good for evil, and the sense of being useful, gave a lightness to Jenny's step ; but, better still, prayer, and care for her aunt, turned into love ; for the surest way to overcome dislike to any one is to pray for and do good to them. And was it weakness only that made aunt Fanny's tones so softened now ? Not exactly. She too had felt the mighty power of gentleness, and, conscience-stricken for her past conduct, resolved to ask forgiveness and try to make amends. John Brown's cottage was an altered one from the day aunt Fannie recovered from her fever. Lightened by love, how easy every task appeared. How gladsome the evening hour when the whole family gathered round the hearth ! Jenny already felt that the "meek do inherit the earth ;" and yet her Bible told her that even a better inheritance lay beyond the sky, purchased and made ready for the pardoned and purified.

VI.

THE CHILD MARTYR OF ANTIOCH.

IT was at Antioch, the city where the disciples were first called Christians, that a deacon of the church of Cæsarea was called to endure the most cruel tortures, in order to try his faith and force him to deny the Lord who bought him with his own precious blood. The martyr, amidst his agonies, declared his belief that there is but “one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” His body was almost torn to pieces, the Roman emperor Galerius himself looking on. At length, weary of answering their taunts that he should acknowledge the many gods of the heathen, he told his tormentors to refer the question to any little child, whose simple understanding could decide whether it were better to worship one

God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and one Saviour who was able to bring us to God, or to worship the gods many and lords many whom the Romans served.

Now it was so that a Roman mother had come to the scene of the martyr's sufferings, holding by the hand a little boy of nine years old. Pity, or the desire of helping the sufferer, had probably brought her there; but the providence of God had ordained for her an unexpected trial. The judge no sooner heard the martyr's words than his eye rested on the child, and, pointing to the boy, he desired the Christian to put the question he proposed to him.

The question was asked; and, to the surprise of those who heard it, the little boy replied, "God is one, and Jesus Christ is one with the Father."

The persecutor heard, but, far from being either softened or convinced, he was filled with fresh rage. "It is a snare," he cried; "oh, base and wicked Christian! thou hast instructed that child to answer thus." Then,

turning to the boy, he said more mildly, “Tell me, child, who taught you thus to speak? How did you learn this faith?”

The boy looked lovingly in his mother’s face, and replied, “It was God’s grace that taught it to my dear mother: and she taught me that Jesus Christ loved little children, and I learned to love him for his love to us.”

“Let us see now what the love of Christ can do for you,” cried the cruel judge; and, at a sign from him, the lictors, or officers, who stood ready with their rods, or sticks, after the fashion of the Romans, instantly seized the boy. Gladly would the mother have saved her timid dove, even at the expense of her own life: but she could not do so; yet did she whisper to him to trust in the love of Christ, and to speak the truth. And the poor child, feeble and timid as he was, did trust in that love; nor could all the cruelty of his tormentors separate him from it.

“What can the love of Christ do for him now?” asked the judge, as the blood streamed from the tender flesh of the boy.

“It enables him to endure what his Master endured for him, and for us all,” was the reply.

And again they smote the child, to torture the Christian mother.

“What can the love of Christ do for him now?” they asked again. And tears fell even from heathen eyes as that Roman mother, a thousand times more tortured than her son, answered, “It teaches him to forgive his persecutors.”

The boy watched his mother’s eye as it rose up to heaven for him, and he thought of the sufferings of his Lord and Saviour, of which she had told him; and when his tormentors inquired whether he would not now acknowledge the gods they served, and deny Christ, he still answered, “No! there is no other God but one: Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world. He loved me, and I love him for his love.”

The poor child now fainted between the repeated strokes, and they cast the mangled body into the mother’s arms, crying, “See

what the love of your Christ can do for him now.”

As the mother pressed it gently to her own crushed heart, she answered, “That love will take him from the wrath of man to the peace of heaven.”

“Mother,” cried the dying boy, “give me a drop of water from our cool well upon my tongue.”

The little martyr spake no more—and then the mother said, “Already, dearest, hast thou tasted of the well that springeth up to everlasting life—the grace of Christ given to his little one—thou hast spoken the truth in love; arise now, for thy Saviour calleth for thee. Young, happy martyr, for his sake, may he grant thy mother grace to follow thy bright path.”

The boy faintly raised his eyes, looked to where the elder martyr was, and said again, “There is but one God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent;” and so saying, he died.

VII.

NELLIE'S APRICOT-TREE.

AFTERNOON lessons were just over, on a warm summer's day, in the village-school at Sunnydale; a merry group of school-girls crossed the green with Nellie Stewart, and passed into the small garden before the cottage where she resided with her mother, who was a widow, and Nellie her only child. A very pretty little cottage it was, with roses and honeysuckle twining over the porch, round the lattice-windows, and up to the thatched roof. The neat garden was stocked with vegetables, and had a goodly supply of flowers too—pinks, roses, wall flowers, sweet-williams, and violet pansies. But the children in the garden did not seem just now to notice the flowers; they, with Nellie in the midst, were gathered round a tree nailed

against the side-wall, on whose branches hung some apricots, the choicest tied up in crape bags.

“Nellie,” one little girl exclaimed, as she looked at the fruit gleaming golden through the black covering, “they are just ripe and beautiful now, and next week you will have to gather them.”

“I am sure they will be the best at the show,” cried another; “then you will have five shillings. How proud you will be, and how rich!”

“What shall you do with it, Nellie?” then asked a chorus of voices.

But while Nellie is disclosing to her companions various plans for the disposal of the money, I must explain that the apricot-tree was her own, having been given to her some time before by the gentleman who owned widow Stewart’s cottage. A neighbour who understood gardening had planted it for Nellie, and taught her how to nail the branches against the wall herself. This was the first year that the fruit had come to perfection.

Though there were not many apricots, they were particularly fine ; and Nellie, at the suggestion of a neighbouring farmer, was about to send the choicest ten to a grand fruit and flower show, to be held at the nearest market-town. Mr. Green had promised to take them for her, and told Nellie that he was almost sure she would get either the first or second prize for them—five shillings or half a crown.

After a little more conversation, Nellie's friends left her—one of them, Mary Archer, lingering behind, to ask her to go that evening to see a young companion of theirs who had been laid aside by illness for many weeks, and it was thought was drawing near to the gates of death. "You know, Nellie," said Mary, "she cannot bear to have many visitors at once, so we will go alone, and I will come for you at six o'clock, for I'm sure your mother will let you go."

Nellie then went home, where she found plenty to do in helping her mother until the appointed hour arrived. The two children found Margaret, the sick girl, lying on her bed

in the little cottage-chamber, looking very pale and thin, but a glad smile of welcome illumined her face as she saw her former playmates and school-fellows enter. They sat down by her side near the lattice-window, through which the sun was shedding its golden evening rays.

After a little quiet talk, Margaret said : “I love to see the sun set as I lie here on my bed ; I have watched it for many evenings past, and I think how soon I shall be in the city which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it ; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

“Do you think you will very soon be there ?” asked Nellie, with tears in her eyes. “Perhaps you may get better.”

But Margaret shook her head. “No, Nellie ; the doctor told father and mother yesterday that I could not live long—very likely not more than a week.” The dying girl spoke those words cheerfully ; she had no fear of death, for Jesus had taken its sting

away for her. The Holy Spirit had convinced her of her state as a sinner, and she had been led to find pardon and peace through the blood of Christ, and now she was ready to depart and be with him, which she felt would be "far better" than to live on earth, though she had kind friends whom she dearly loved.

Just as Mary and Nellie were about to leave, Margaret's mother entered the room with a plate of nice ripe plums. "My child," she said, "Mrs. Bell has sent you this present; it is very kind, for I know she depends on getting money by selling her fruit. I told her I thought she could hardly spare these, but she begged me to take them for you."

"It is kind indeed, mother," said Margaret, "and you must tell her how much I am obliged to her—I am sure I shall like them."

"And may you eat fruit, then?" asked Nellie.

"Oh! yes; the doctor says I may have as much as I like, and I enjoy it more than anything else I eat."

“Poor child!” her mother said, tenderly stroking Margaret’s soft brown hair; “I wish I had more fruit for you—it is very little that you take beside.”

But Margaret’s father and mother were poor and had several young children; so they could not afford to buy luxuries for her. Nellie Stewart knew this, and suddenly a thought came into her mind, which she could not get rid of, all the time she was walking home with Mary Archer. They said good-by at Mary’s door, and Nellie ran on and into their own little garden, and there she paused before her apricot-tree. “How much Margaret would enjoy these beautiful apricots; and to-morrow is her birth-day—the last one she will spend on earth, she told us; what a nice birthday-present this fruit would be!” And then Nellie thought of the five shillings that she hoped to gain as a prize for the fruit, and of what she intended to buy with it. Much she wished that she could keep one or two of the best for her sick friend, but she knew that less than ten could not be sent to be

exhibited, and only that number had been selected for the purpose and were now just ripe. Then the thought came: "Could I not send the fruit to the show first, and give it to Margaret afterward?" But, ah! Nellie knew that Margaret did not expect to live many days—perhaps before the show was over she might be gone from earth. Nellie looked at the other apricots, and felt them to ascertain if they were ripe—no, they would not be fully so for a week or more. "And even then," thought she, "they will not be so nice as these in the bags that have been so well attended to, and I should like Margaret to have the best. Well, I will think about it, and ask mother."

The little girl did think about it that evening, and when she was safe in bed, and her mother came to give her a good-night kiss, Nellie told her what she had been meditating upon.

"Margaret is so fond of fruit, mother, and I feel as though I should so like to give her my large apricots. It would be very nice to

get a prize for them, but I think it would be better to give them to Margaret. May I do it, mother?"

"Certainly, my child, you may do as you like with your own fruit. I am sure poor Margaret would enjoy it very much. But you must go to sleep now, and tell me to-morrow morning what you decide to do; and do not forget to ask the Lord to direct you, Nellie. It seems a trifling matter; but we know that without him not a sparrow falleth to the ground." And with another warm kiss, her mother left her.

Nellie's resolution seemed strengthened next morning, and we find her before school-hours, going to Mrs. Gray's cottage, carefully carrying a basket, in which, amongst their green leaves, nestled eight of the beautiful golden apricots. Nellie had left two out of the ten for her mother and herself, meaning to divide some of the smaller ones, when ripe, amongst her school-friends. "I am very glad," thought she, as she went along, "that Margaret does not know that I meant to send

these to the show ; for if she did, she would perhaps be unwilling to have them, and it might spoil her enjoyment. I do not believe I told her that my tree had such nice fruit this year, she will be surprised, I dare say."

And Margaret was surprised, ay, and pleased, and thankful too for the welcome birthday-gift. "Nellie," she said, "only the other day I was thinking how I should like an apricot. I remember I had one last year, and I did not expect to taste any again."

It required some persuasion from Nellie to induce Margaret to take the whole of the fruit brought. "I don't know how to thank you, Nellie," she said. "It is not only the fruit, but your thoughtful kindness, that I want to thank you for." But her friend's evident pleasure, the bright smile on her pale face, and her loving embrace, were thanks enough for Nellie, who ran off to school with a light heart. When her companions found out what had become of the apricots, some blamed and some commended Nellie's conduct, and Mr. Green, when he heard that the fruit had been

given away, and so he was not to take it to the show after all, evidently thought that the owner of the tree had acted foolishly. But Nellie, when she remembered Margaret's smile and look of thanks, and when she heard from little Emma Gray, that her sister had enjoyed the apricots "*so* much, more than any fruit she had had before," felt that indeed "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*"

Only a few days after her birthday-visit, Nellie went to see Margaret again. Mrs. Gray met her with tearful eyes, and the child learned from her that the Master's summons had come for Margaret sooner than her loving friends expected—an hour or two before, her spirit had left its earthly tenement. The bereaved mother led Nellie to the darkened room where the body of her child lay; the face of the dead was pleasant to look upon, so sweet and calm was the expression on the still, pallid features. Nellie mingled her tears with those of Margaret's sorrowing family, but though they wept at parting from one they loved so well, yet they were com-

forted by the thought that she was now at rest for ever with Jesus, in the land where sin and suffering, sorrow and death, are all unknown.

VIII.

EMMA AND ELIZA.

IF you should ever go to Ireton Dale, ask for Green Bank farm. It is a sweet, pretty spot, just under the hill-side where the Ecclesburr comes tumbling and leaping over the rocks, in such a terrible hurry that you would almost think it was frightened, and was running to hide itself under aunt's garden wall ; and as you cross the brook to go up the garden, you have to go over such a delightful little rustic bridge, it is almost like a walk through a bed of roses, for the footway is only wide enough to allow of two persons passing each other, and roses are trained up and around the rails with which it is guarded on each side. But the house is prettiest, with its ivy-covered front and porch laden with roses and honeysuckles, while from the

window you can see down the valley for miles, and trace the brook as it runs slowly along, looking for all the world like a band of silver in the sunlight. Ah! I have often thought I should like to live there. It is so quiet and so pleasant to watch the cows come up to be milked, and to see the haymakers load the carts with the sweet-smelling hay in the fields below. I used to think that nothing bad could dwell there amidst so much that was beautiful and good; but one day when I went to pay aunt and her two little girls, Emma and Eliza, a visit, I found out my mistake. It was a beautiful day in September, and Eliza and Emma had been playing on the grass in front of the house, when their mother came out with a basket in each hand and called them.

“My dears,” she said, “here is a basket each, with a piece of cake in it, and I want you to go and gather me some blackberries in the Cow-lane.”

Now what she called the Cow-lane was a narrow road that led through the farm and

over the hills to the little village of Bread-sall. It was not like one of our dusty road-ways about Manchester ; its sides were lined all along with blackberry bushes and rose trees, underneath peeped the foxglove and orchis, and the grassy banks were gay with wild flowers. This was the road along which the girls were going. Emma had stayed behind to gather some berries, while Eliza ran forward. Just as she turned a corner of the road she almost tumbled over a mild-looking, gray-haired old woman, sitting on a stone by the roadside ; she had no shoes or stockings on, and a stick and crutch lay on the bank close by her, for she was lame. The one foot that she could use was cut and bleeding, and she seemed to be almost fainting with hunger and thirst.

“ My child,” she said, as soon as she saw Eliza, “ be kind to a poor old woman who has had nothing to eat but a dry crust of bread since yesterday morning.”

Now Eliza was not on the whole a bad girl, but she was selfish ; had she been in posses-

sion of anything she could have given her without making a sacrifice herself, I have no doubt that she would have done so. But to give her the cake! why, that had been uppermost in her thoughts all the morning, ever since her mother had given it to her, and she was even now looking for a nice, quiet, cozy corner, where she could eat it, and enjoy it all by herself. She hesitated only a moment, and then self prevailed.

“No, my good woman,” she said, “I would gladly help you, but I can’t, I have nothing.”

And thus she tried to hide her selfishness by telling a lie; but we need not wonder much at that, for when self prevails all other considerations flee. And she ran on, and was soon lost to sight behind the bushes on the roadside.

A few minutes afterwards Emma came along, singing. She stopped, however, as soon as she saw the pitiable condition that the woman was in, and went up to her.

“My good woman,” she said, “you seem

hungry and tired ; can I be of any service to you ? ” and without waiting for an answer, she pulled out her cake, gave it to her, and kneeling down she tied her handkerchief round her wounded foot.

“ Thank you ! child, for your kindness ; yours is the only kind voice that I have heard for many a day . ”

“ And now , ” said Emma, after she had finished her kind labour, “ you will soon be able to resume your journey, and get home . ”

“ Home ! my dear child , ” said the old woman, with tears in her eyes, “ it is a long time since I had a home . ”

“ But you must live somewhere , ” said Emma, her eyes wide open with astonishment, for she could not conceive how any one could be without a home . ”

“ I had one once , ” said the woman, “ but I have travelled a long way in search of my son, who left me many years ago to find work about here, and if God will only grant me strength to find him, I shall die content . ”



EMMA AND ELIZA.

“But did he never let you hear from him afterwards?” asked Emma.

“No,” replied the old woman, “for soon after he left us we were obliged to remove, for my husband went to work in a distant part of the country. But he is now dead, and I have no one to look to for help and protection, unless I can find my son.”

“Indeed,” said Emma, who could scarcely believe that so much suffering existed. “What was his name, pray? perhaps I may know something about him.”

“I am afraid not, child; for he went long before you would be born, but his name was John Edwards.”

No sooner had Emma heard the name than a thought struck her, “It was her own father’s name;” she had often heard him wonder what had become of his parents, as he never could find out where they had gone to. This, then, must be her grandmother. However, she would see; she would take her home with her, and tell her mother. To think was with the kind-hearted girl to act. She asked the old

woman if she would go with her home, as her mother would be able to tell her, perhaps. And gently assisting her to rise, she went with her towards the house.

Now, while the girls were away, their father had come home to dinner and was just rising to go back when his little girl came in, and told him that some one wished to see him. He opened the door, and stood as if trans-fixed. There before him was the mother he had so long mourned as dead. She recognised him, too, and so great was her joy and astonishment, she forgot her lameness, and rushed forward and fell into the arms of her long-lost son. And Emma was overjoyed to have been the cause of so much happiness.

We must now return to Eliza, to see how she fares with her selfishness and her cake. She has found her quiet corner, a nice grassy seat hid behind a large rosebush and covered with daisies. But is she enjoying herself? An observer would say no. She sits silently picking her cake bit by bit, and as she sits and thinks, better thoughts come to her. She

wonders what her mother would think if she knew about it. And then the lie she told. Oh dear ! she thinks the cake is not half so good as she thought it would be. She wonders whether the old woman is gone, and where Emma is. And now she goes into the middle of the road to see. But there is no one to be seen. Ah ! if she only knew what was taking place at home just then. But she did not ; so she went on picking berries till her basket was full, and then went home.

I leave you, my dear readers, to imagine the surprise, the mortification and shame which filled Eliza, when she saw the old woman to whom she had been so unkind on the road sitting in her mother's arm-chair by the fire-side, and heard her father say that she had got a grandmother now. But I am happy in being able to say that her better feelings conquered at last, and before she went to bed she had asked and received her grandmother's pardon and forgiveness for her unkindness and for the lie which she confessed she had told her.

This story was told me while I was visiting there, and I believe that it has effected a great change for the better in Eliza's character, for she never seems so happy now as when she is showing her grandmother those little kindnesses which make home and life so pleasant and happy.

IX.

ESTHER, THE JEWISH MAIDEN.

WE will suppose that in the days when our Lord Jesus Christ lived in this world, wearing the form of man, there was in one of the villages of Judea a little girl named Esther. She had been brought up by a good and pious mother, and was a very thoughtful child ; and as she heard the Scriptures read, and listened to the old men who talked with her grandfather about the glory of the latter days and the resurrection of the just, she would say to herself,

“ How will it be with me when they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ? I have done so many wrong things—I have not always honoured my father and my mother—I am so often selfish and impatient—I am fretful and discontented, and I am not one of

the righteous." And day by day she was very sad.

One evening, she heard these old men talking about the wonderful young man who was going about healing the sick and raising the dead.

"But the most wonderful of all," said Eliezer, her grandfather's friend, "is, that he has power over evil spirits, and that he forgives sins."

"He forgives sins," exclaimed Esther to herself; "O that I knew where I might find him!" Then, taking her tiny water-jar, she followed her elder sister to the fountain. Thither had already come their cousin Rachel, who saluted them.

"Dost thou know, Martha," said she, "that Jesus of Nazareth has come into our village? He tarries at the house of Jonathan. My mother will carry to him to-morrow our little Simon."

"I wish I could go with them!" said Esther eagerly, and then she blushed, for her sister and cousin turned to her with surprise.

"Thou art neither blind nor lame, cousin Esther," said Rachel.

But Martha, seeing her sister's confusion, bade her come home, saying it was late. "I truly hope, cousin Rachel, that he will be able to open thy brother's eyes," she said, as she took up her water-jar.

When they had left the fountain, Martha said kindly to her sister, "Why do you wish to see Jesus of Nazareth?"

"O my sister," replied Esther, "I wish to have my sins forgiven. I am so unhappy. I fear I shall never have a part in the resurrection of the just that my grandfather and Eliezer talk about." And Esther wept.

"Thou art a strange child. But I will ask our mother what we can do to see him."

Esther thanked her sister, but during the night she scarcely slept. Should she see that great Prophet whom the common people believed to be the Messiah? And was it likely, if she did, that he would notice her?

As the morning began to dawn, she fell asleep. She was awakened by her sister, who said, "It is time to rise, if thou wouldest go to the house of Jonathan."

She sprang from her couch, and robed herself hastily. She could scarcely taste the morning meal, and soon set out with her sister and mother. On the way they were joined by Rachel and her mother, who led between them the little blind lad.

There was already a crowd gathering about the house, but a man of the village passed in before them with his demoniac son, from whom the throng shrank somewhat back, and the eager women with the blind boy pressed close behind until they came into an inner room where were Jesus and his disciples. They stood in his very presence, and Esther felt her whole heart go out to him in unutterable love, as she looked on his face, so full of majesty yet so overflowing with infinite love and compassion.

He fixed his eyes on the demoniac, who began now to be fearfully convulsed,

foaming at the mouth and gnashing his teeth.

“Thou unclean spirit, come out of him!” said the Master.

The young man fell to the floor like one dead, but Jesus taking him by the hand lifted him up—living, rejoicing, a new being; for all his life long he had been tormented and distressed. The young man and his father drew back, and Simon, the blind boy, stood before the Lord. He put his fingers upon the eyes of the boy, and instantly he looked up with a new smile on his face, and after one long look at Jesus, turned to the group behind him, and catching his mother’s hand he drew his own over her features to be sure he knew her, and his whole face dimpled with delight. But Esther could not look away from the great and wonderful Healer.

A young mother brought up her babe, flushed with fever and moaning with pain; her tears choked her words as she offered it to his touch. He looked graciously on her; he laid his hand on the baby’s head and it

opened its heavy eyes and looked about, joyous and wondering as though just roused from sleep to consciousness ; it saw its mother's face of glad surprise and smiled and sprang up to her neck, and caressed her in its pretty baby ways.

Other mothers were looking on, with their children, rosy in health, joyful in the fulness of life, but they pressed up to his feet—

“ O that thou wouldest lay thy hand on *our* children and leave the virtue of thy touch upon them.”

Then the disciples said, “ Trouble not the Master needlessly.” But Jesus rebuked them, and bade the little children come to him, and he took them up in his arms and blessed them.

“ O happy children !” thought Esther, “ to rest in his arms and lean on his bosom !” And she, too, pressed forward and knelt before him with her head bowed almost to his feet. The prayer was in her heart, “ O that my sins might be forgiven ?” but the words died from her lips without sound.

She felt the gentle touch of his kind hand upon her head ; she heard him say :

“ Damsel, be it unto thee even as thou wilt ! ” She believed his words. She had seen his power and his goodness. She knew that he was able—she felt that he was willing to forgive her sins. She believed his words. And ever after, among the household or in the night-watches, alone in the garden or with the maidens by the fountain, she was as though she had drunk of the water of life, and felt it for ever springing up within her. She had obtained forgiveness of sin ? and now should she not most carefully guard her lips, and keep her hands and feet, and watch her life, doing whatever her hands found to do with cheerfulness and content, as the birds work and the lilies grow.

If she was surprised into ill-humour or impatience, she was grieved and instantly prayed, “ Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy

presence ; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ; and uphold me by thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy way ; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

And she believed that Jehovah who manifested himself between the cherubim, heard her, and answered her.

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked die ?" saith the Lord God, "and not that he should return from his way and live ? I will forgive thine iniquity, and thy sin will I remember no more."

And as it was in the days when our Lord dwelt among men, wearing flesh, so it is now. In him is life, and the life is the light of men. We have only to ask him in ever so low a whisper ; we have only to cast ourselves at his feet, without words, and we may believe that he receives us.

You go to him, my young friends, who read this little story—desire he would accept your offering of yourself, believe he does so, as you hear him yet saying, "Him that

cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Do not wait for some great and marvellous light to shine. Believe his simple word that he *does* love you and will receive you.

JOHNNY'S FATE.

JOHNNY was an Irish boy, the brother of one of my maids. The first I knew of him was on a Christmas when he sent my two years' old son a pretty toy, a little china lion lying on a rug of ornamented broadcloth. Johnny was then a little fellow, but he had in some way earned four cents for the celebration of Christmas. He had heard much from his sister of the chubby, bright-eyed, prattling boy of whom she had the care, and instead of indulging his childish appetite for dainties, he gratified his kind and generous heart by sending a present to the child he had learned to love, although he had never seen him.

“And Johnny spent *all* his money for the little lion?” I asked, when I heard the history of the present.

"He spent all he had. The lion would have been more, but Johnny had but four cents and he wanted it so much that the man let him have it for that. He's been looking at it a long time in the shop window."

"And it was *all* the toy Johnny had?" I further asked.

"It was."

Generous boy! My heart was touched by his large, unselfish nature. For a long time after that I kept Johnny in pleasant and grateful remembrance, often inquiring as to his welfare and hearing a hopeful account of him.

When he was old enough, he learned the printing business and became an excellent workman. His fine disposition made him a favourite with his employer, and everything promised well for him. Sometimes there was a press of work in the office, and Johnny with other hands was obliged to work all night.

Here begins the lesson of my story. Mark now how Johnny came to ruin! Working day and night together is wearing and exhaust-

ing even to the young and strong, and Johnny learned of his comrades to take a little liquor to refresh and stimulate him after a night of unbroken toil. "It brought him up." "It made him feel better." Yes, brought him up for a time, to sink him to ruin at last; made him feel better for an hour, to plunge him into sickening shame and woe for long, slow, weary months, perhaps for years, perhaps for a life-time.

Johnny drank but seldom and never to excess, but there is no safety in the cup. It is poison, and you cannot trust it. It is deadly, and will destroy. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." "At the last, it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Johnny knows that now—he knows too well. Learn it of him and his fate. Better so learn it than in your own history.

It was the night before the Fourth of July, one of the hottest, sultriest nights in which a city ever swelters. In a low back-room, on one of the closest alleys of the most crowded

business section of Boston, Johnny stood at his high desk by the hot gaslight setting types all night. At day-break, the jollity and exultation of our national day broke forth, but Johnny patiently toiled on. At sunrise the cannon boomed triumphantly, calling to every one to come forth with rejoicing for the joy of liberty, but Johnny worked on, faithful to his employer. Desirous to finish his labour, and have some time for the festivities of the day, he refused himself the time for breakfast ; but alas, he took a glass of liquor instead ! Stimulated by it, he went on with his work. Another glass of liquor for lunch. His strength held out ; he was doing well. He worked fast, and soon after midday his work was done, and he promised himself a season of pleasure. He felt that he had earned it by his night of toil.

Dressed in his best, he joined some young comrades. The exhaustion of labour, the heat of the weather create a thirst. Liquor again. It mounts to the youth's brain ; he is excited ; a word is carelessly spoken ; he is inflamed ;

there is violence. What was said, what was done, what was the guilt, I never learned; but Johnny, alas! poor Johnny, was arrested and hurried away to a dark, loathsome cell in the Tombs. What a place for a pleasant, kind-hearted, bright youth to keep holiday in! "Surely wine is a mocker, and strong drink raging," and Johnny was deceived thereby. He felt the serpent coil and the adder sting.

What an afternoon was that for him! How long! how terrible! What a night followed! How he longed for the sweat and toil of the printing-room, for its sweat was honour, its stifling air was freedom. Will that night of shame and wretchedness never break in dawn for him? But what will come in the morning? The public trial, the exposure, the distress of father and friends. Thank God that his mother cannot sorrow for him in her still grave! Thank God that she never had to weep for him.

After the trial? Johnny drives away the thought of what may be then; the condemnation, the manacles, the black cart, the House

of Correction ; and yet he knows that they are almost a certainty before him, for who can help him ? Who knows where he is ? who will tell his father ?

No one told his father, and the desolate old man waited late into the night, but the loved son did not come. In the morning he asked of others, " Do you know anything of Johnny ? "

It came like a thunder-burst on the poor father. " Johnny is in court."

He hurried thither. " My boy in court ! Where ? " he asks. His eye is on the pale, haggard, trembling, weeping youth. Can that be the bright, gay, hopeful Johnny ? Surely strong drink has deceived him, cheated him, stolen from him everything.

The father crowds to his side. " Johnny ! "

" Father, it's over. I'm sentenced."

" Sentenced for what, my son ? " Johnny buries his face in his hands. A groan of unendurable anguish escapes him.

Ah, you who sell strong drink, who hold the poison to the lips of the young, look at

this ruin ! See the noble boy mixed with the filth and felony of the gutters ! See the shackles binding him as he is crowded into the prison cart ! See the young head bowed low with the weight of agony ! I have heard you say that "liquor does a man good." Does it ? Will you say so now ? I am indignant, angry with you for the sake of *one* poor boy, and yet how many, what multitudes have you ruined.

It was a long time that Johnny had to serve in the House of Correction, ten weary months. He was tried on three indictments, one for drunkenness and two for assault and battery, and found guilty and sentenced on all ; with how much justice I knew not, but this I know, that his sisters never believed him guilty of aggravated wrong, they loved him dearly and spoke of him tenderly and without reproach, always giving him the softened name by which I have spoken of him. And this I know also, that he had no chance for defence. There was no one to call witnesses or plead in his behalf, no one to tell of

his previous good character and ask the favour of the court. The poor fellow did not even know on how many indictments he was tried or how long his term of sentence. When six sad tedious months had passed in prison, the bright summer gone, the beautiful autumn come and gone and winter on the earth, Johnny thought the time had come for his release. He was so weary of the dark, cold prison walls, the forlorn parti-coloured garb, the lonely meal, the lonelier evening and Sabbath, so disgusted with the low and vile and desperate men with whom he was classed, so homesick for home and love and kind companionship, that it was too hard to tell him that there were yet four long months of confinement before him. Four months more of cold, hard, shameful prison life, to a youth with warm blood in every vein, vitality in every nerve! Poor Johnny wept like a child, when he was told it.

It was then I heard of his wretched fate. His broken-hearted father and sisters petitioned the Governor for his release. Men

of influence signed the petition, but in vain. Too many had been pardoned already, justice must be more firm. There was nothing for Johnny but to wear out his penalty, to drink to the very dregs his cup of bitterness ; to feel to the full that "the way of transgressors is hard," and to realize again and again in loneliness and anguish that he "who is deceived by strong drink is not wise."

I have never inquired after Johnny since his release ; I have not had the heart to breathe his name to his sisters, lest I might waken some feeling of embarrassment or shame on his account, but of this I am sure, that his suffering for his sin in strong drink could not have ended with his imprisonment. All through life will he suffer in remembrance of his shame, all through life, there will be times when he will feel that he is a marked and branded man. Never can he forget that he has been the companion of the base, the corrupt, the abandoned ; that he has been shut up from his fellow-men as unfit to dwell with them.

Who dares touch the cup with such a fate
to warn him ? Who will handle the serpent
or tempt the adder while a poisoned victim is
writhing in agony before him ?

XI.

THE WORST BOY IN SCHOOL.

“Is that one of my scholars?”

Miss Merton, the new teacher, pointed to a lad just outside the garden-fence. He was ragged and dirty—barefooted too—and wore an old straw hat, so much in pieces that his tangled locks stuck up “any how” through the holes. He was throwing stones at a robin’s nest that hung high up in a cherry tree, and screeching all the time in a way that made one involuntarily clap their hands to their ears.

“I am sorry to say it is,” replied Deacon Gray. “The worst boy in school, too; the one that will give you the most trouble. Indeed, I don’t believe you’ll ever be able to do anything with him. He’s as strong as a giant, little short fellow as he is. He flogged

the teacher last winter. He's the worst boy, take him all in all, I ever saw."

"Has he parents?"

"No; his mother died when he was a baby, and his father, a hard-working man, hadn't any time to see to him; and the child, I expect, had a pretty hard time of it, with one old maid or another for housekeeper. When he was five years old his father died, and since that he has been tossed from pillar to post.

"He's naturally a bright boy, and if his mother had lived, he might have been somebody; for she was just one of the most patient loving women you ever saw in all your life—a Christian woman, if there ever was one."

"Poor boy!" Miss Merton spoke tenderly. "What a pity somebody doesn't adopt him; take him into their home and heart."

"That's just what I've told father many a time," said Mrs. Gray, looking up from the bread she was kneading. "I've always said, if some one would only take him in, and do

by him as they would by their own born child, it would be the saving of him."

"Mother wanted me to take him this spring, when he was out of a place, but I told her it was too risky. If I hadn't any children, I might, perhaps; but to have such a rough, tearing, swearing, mischievous boy here all the time with my three little girls, teaching all sorts of badness to that youngster there," and he pointed to a two-year old boy who sat on the floor playing with pussy—"I couldn't risk it. Yet I'm sorry for him."

"That's what everybody says," continued his wife. "They are all sorry for him, but no one is willing to try and reform him; and if it isn't done soon, it'll be too late, for just as sure as he goes on the way he is now, he'll be in the penitentiary before he's twenty-one."

"I wish you had taken him in." Miss Merton spoke earnestly.

"You won't wish so a month hence," said the Deacon; "just wait till you've seen him at school."

“But if I do think so four weeks from now, will you take him? Say yes; please do.” And she laid her hand confidingly on his arm.

“Well, yes; if after that time you think you can do anything with him, why, I’ll try him a bit. But he’s a hard case.”

Miss Merton looked out of the window again. The boy had climbed over the paling, and was now starting up a tree. She went out quietly into the front garden. There were not many flowers in bloom yet, only a few daffodils, a bunch of *fleur de lis*, and a border of violets. She gathered a few of the latter, and sauntered leisurely down the gravelled walk, pausing now and then to look at the annuals just peeping out of the moist ground. By-and-bye she reached the cherry tree, on whose lowest bough the boy yet stood, for he had not advanced a foot since she came out, having been closely eyeing her.

“What are you trying to get, little boy?” She spoke pleasantly, and a lovely smile played about her lips.

"A robin's nest, ma'am." He was no liar, with all his faults.

"Oh! I wouldn't." Her voice had a grieved tone. "It would be such a pity, when the birds have just finished it. Are there eggs in it?"

"I don't know; I'll see." And he climbed rapidly to the nest. "Yes, ma'am, four." He didn't touch them, but came down again to the lowest bough.

"There'll be little birds soon, then, and it'll be so pleasant for me to watch them. I wish you wouldn't touch them."

"I won't, ma'am. I didn't want it for myself, but poor little Tommy said last night he wished he had a string of bird's eggs to look at. Tommy is lame, ma'am, and can't get out much, and he gets lonesome, and wants something to play with. So I thought I'd get him some."

"Is Tommy your brother?"

"No, ma'am. I never had a brother, or sister either." His voice softened as he spoke

"He belongs to the folks where I stay."

“I’ll send Tommy something as pretty as bird’s eggs. See here,” and she broke off a large bunch of lilacs, and handed him the purple plumes. “Carry this to him. Put it in a pitcher of water, and it’ll keep fresh several days; and here are some flowers for you.” And she gave him the little bunch of violets she had gathered. “Run quick with them now, or you will be late to school. You’re going to school, aren’t you?”

“Are you the new teacher?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going, then; I’ll be there in time.”
And he ran off.

Now, only the night before, he had declared downright to Tommy that he wouldn’t go to school. It was no use. He never would be anybody, and he was tired of being flogged, and beaten, and boxed. He wouldn’t stand it from a woman teacher. And if they sent him to school, he’d play truant. Yet the very next morning he was in a hurry to go, fearful he should be late. Who will dare to say there is not magic in kind words?

Miss Merton went early to the school-house. The "worst boy" was already there.

"Ah!" said she, kindly, "you've outrun me. But I am very glad you're here, for I want to learn something about the school. What is your name?"

"Bill Hendrickson, ma'am."

"Say William, my dear, or Willie. Bill is not a pretty nickname."

"It's what I've been called ever since my father died." And he sighed.

"Then your father is dead, poor boy." She spoke tenderly, "And your mother?"

"She's dead, too, ma'am. She died when I was a little baby. I cannot even remember how she looked." And now tears gathered into his blue eyes.

Courage! thought Miss Merton. A boy who weeps at the mention of his dead mother cannot be all bad. And she laid her hands caressingly on his brown hair, and said softly, "I know how to feel for you, Willie; for I, too, am an orphan."

That gentle touch! It melted the poor boy's

heart entirely ; but with the better feelings that then surged over his soul, came a feeling of shame, too, and for the first time in his life he blushed for his matted hair, and his dirty face and hands.

“I believe,” he said, after a moment’s thought, “I’ll run down to the brook, and wash myself. I forgot it this morning. No, I didn’t, either,” disdaining the falsehood.

“I was too wild to do it, but I’ll wash now.”

“Do, Willie, that’s a good boy. I love to see my pupils neat and tidy. Here’s a towel for you. I always bring one with me to school, for the little ones often need washing after dinner. And here is a pocket-comb ; I’ll give it to you, if you’ll promise to use it every day.”

Willie ran to the brook, and made such a dexterous use of the towel and comb, that he hardly seemed like the same boy when he returned ; for he was a handsome little fellow, with a high, fair brow, and a wealth of nut-brown hair clustering about his temples, in soft silky curls.

“I shall not have much time to talk to you, for I hear the children coming.” And as she spoke, little snatches of musical laughter came ringing through the open door. “But one thing I must say: I need your help, Willie.”

He looked up, and his blue eyes dilated in wonder. His help! What could he do to help her?

She continued: “I need your help, Willie. You are probably one of the oldest pupils I shall have, and the little ones will all look up to you as an example. If they see you quiet, mannerly, orderly, faithful to your studies, and prompt in recitations, they will strive to emulate you, and I shall have but little difficulty in governing the school; but if, on the contrary, you are noisy, forward, rude, negligent of your lessons, and dilatory in coming to your class, they will imbibe your spirit, and I shall go home every night sad and weary. Willie, you are cut out for a good boy”—and she moved her hand over his now glossy hair. “Your head is a good one. If you

only guide it with your heart, it will make a good and perhaps a great man of you. Can I trust you, Willie? Will you help me to make this school a credit to the district?"

Willie had never been talked to in that way before. He had never had trust reposed in him. He hardly knew what to make of it now, but he did not hesitate to say at once, "I will help you all I can. Perhaps I shall forget sometimes, and act bad, because I'm so used to it, that it'll go hard to be good all at once; but if I do, just look at me, and I'll give up."

The other scholars came in just then, and looked surprised enough to see Willie there in earnest conversation with the teacher. They hung back bashfully.

"Tell me their names, Willie," said Miss Merton, kindly; and as he told each one, she took them gently by the hand, stroking the heads of the little boys, and kissing the cheeks of the little girls.

School opened. The scholars watched in vain for Willie to begin his antics; but, proud

of the confidence reposed in him, he never that morning violated a single rule.

“ You have done nobly,” said Miss Merton to him, as, at the nooning, she sat down by him. She opened her dinner-basket. “ Bless me, but Mrs. Gray must have thought I had a wolf’s appetite. Can you help me to devour some of this generous dinner ? ” The boy, used to scraps and crusts, took eagerly the nice white bread, the thin slices of pink ham, the fresh, hard-boiled eggs, the seed-cakes, and rhubarb pie.

“ Are there any cowslips by the brook ? ” she asked, when the meal was finished.

“ Oh ! yes, ma’am, plenty of them.”

“ I wish you would bring me five or six pretty ones. I am going to make a herbarium, and I want some of all the early flowers.”

The boy didn’t know what a herbarium was : but he brought the flowers quickly, and looked on with curious eyes while she analyzed one of them, and then, after consulting her botany, carefully arranged the remainder

in the shape of a crescent, and placed them between the leaves of the large blank book she took from her desk.

The other scholars gathered about her, and one little girl asked what she did that for.

Miss Merton explained, and then carefully turning the leaves, showed them a page on which lay pressed the delicate stars of the trailing arbutus; and another, on which lay the shell-tinted flowers of the anemone; and another, where the pretty little spring beauties lay clustered in a wreath.

“I am desirous of making a very large and beautiful collection; for I wish to present it, when finished, to an invalid friend of mine—a lady whose lameness prevents her getting out into the fields and forests to see the flowers. Do you know, Willie, whether there is any blood-root grows about here? I don’t know but it is too late for its blossoms, but I hope not, for I want some of them very much; they are so beautiful—such a snowy whiteness in the flower.”

“I know where there’s plenty, ma’am.

I've helped to dig it, many a time. Old Granny Wilmott, where I used to live, always wanted some put in spirits every spring. I'll get you some to-morrow."

"Do, Willie, and any other wild-flowers you may find. I shall be so glad of them; and in return, I'll teach you botany at noons, and before school in the morning, and give you a book like mine to place your specimens in. Wouldn't you like to have a herbarium?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am, I guess I should." And the blue eyes were very bright. Early the next morning, Willie was at the school-house with six beautiful specimens of blood-root, and several other spring flowers which had peeped out of the moss and underbrush of the forest. And Miss Merton opened the new herbarium, with William Hendrickson written on the cover, and a beautiful piece of poetry on the first page. She divided all the flowers, and gave him half, showing him how to analyze them, and how to press them, and writing under each the name, class, and order, the spot where it grew, its peculiar character-

istics, its medicinal qualities, if it had any, and also an appropriate quotation from some poet, and the language which florists have given it.

The week passed on. Friday night came, and Willie, instead of being the worst, had been the best boy in the school. He was a bright little fellow, and now that his mind and heart were engaged, he bade fair to outstrip all his mates. Miss Merton shared her dinner with him every day, removing thus one cause of the boy's restlessness and disobedience; for every one knows a full stomach—not an overloaded, but a comfortably full stomach—disposes one to be more genial and orderly than an empty one can possibly do.

They walked home together on Friday evening—the school-mistress and the little, ragged, barefooted, almost hatless pupil. She made the way pleasant to him, talking to him of the beautiful world that they lived in, and pointing out the various interesting things that were all about them—the old gray mountains in the distance, with the purple shadows

of evening drooping over them; the green fields beside them, with the white lambkins sporting over them; the dim forest, its cathedral aisles stretching far into the distance; the blooming orchards, with their snowy promises; the little brooklet, with its singing waves; the brown and golden birds, filling the scented air with their clear notes; and lastly, the scarlet west, with the amber currents of sunshine playing over it in gorgeous tides. And when she knew his heart was interested, and full of unutterable feeling, she said quietly, "What a good God! to place us in a world so fair. Would you not like to know something more about him, Willie? Would you not like to study that holy book of his, which he has given mankind to show them the way to heaven?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am." And the boy spoke devoutly.

"I thought you would, and so I asked you."

"I am going to have a class in the Sabbath-school, and shall open it next Sabbath. You will come, Willie, and be one of my scholars."

"I'd like to, ma'am." And then he glanced at his bare feet, and his ragged clothes, and sighed, as he added, "But I don't see how I can. These are all the clothes I have to wear."

"I've thought of that, Willie ; and if you will come to-morrow morning to the Deacon's, and let me have your jacket a while, I'll mend it up for you ; and here's a shilling I'll give you, to go to the store and buy a new hat. You can get a good straw one for that, can't you?"

"Oh! yes. Dear me, how good you are to me ! I don't see what makes you so. Everybody else frets and scolds at me, and says I'll go to the penitentiary yet, I'm so bad."

"I love you, Willie, and that is why I treat you as I do. An orphan myself, I can feel for your lonely life. Heaven only knows what I might have been, had not good friends cared for me when my father and mother died, and left me alone in the wide world. Willie, I've great hopes of you. You learn

quickly, remember well, and see into things easily. You are capable of making yourself a good name in the world. You will do it, too ; I know you will. Don't you believe it ?" And she looked hopefully into his eyes.

" I want to ; oh ! if I only could ! I'll try. I'll study hard every day, and I'll go to Sabbath-school every Sabbath. And if I do grow up good, I'll lay it all to you, for no one else ever cared for me. They even *grudge* me my victuals. Oh ! but I've seen hard times." And tears trickled down his cheeks.

" Don't think of them, Willie. Look forward. There is a sunny future in store for you. Good night. Don't forget to bring the jacket."

" What under the sun have you got in your hands, Miss Merton ?" said Mrs. Gray, the next morning, as the school-mistress entered the kitchen.

" Why it's Willie's jacket. I've promised to mend it for him, so that he can go to Sabbath-school to-morrow, and I've come to beg some patches."

“I am quite sure you can never mend that ragged thing.”

“Oh, yes, I can. Where can I find some patches?”

“Why, there’s lots of them in the loft over the woodshed. I store them up there for carpet-rags all through the winter, and in the spring take them down, and wash them up, and sort them over. But, dear me, you never can do anything with that old thing.”

“You’ll see,” was the cheerful response; and the school-mistress mounted up the ladder to the loft, and selected some suitable patches. Sitting down by the window, she ripped both sleeves above the elbow, cut off the rags, and pieced them down, sewed up the seams again, and put in fresh lining, and made new cuffs. Then she cut off the torn button-holes, pieced out the sides, and made new ones, and darned here and there, till there was not a single hole.

“Has the school-mistress turned tailoress?” said the Deacon, as he came in to dinner. “What wages do you make?”

“Oh! good ones, I tell you. Ain’t I a good hand at patching?” And she held up the neatly mended jacket. And then, before she could speak further, Mrs. Gray told the Deacon whose it was, and how it looked when she brought it in.

“You must have some hopes of the boy, Miss Merton, or you would not take so much pains with him.”

“I have great hopes of him, Deacon Gray.” And she detailed the experience of the week.

“Ah! but one swallow don’t make up a summer.”

“I know it, Deacon, but then one swallow is a harbinger of summer. It gives us hope of seed-time and harvest. It tells us there is warm weather somewhere, Deacon. I have studied the boy this week, and I am satisfied that he only needs kind treatment and encouragement to place him far above the average of men. Oh! if you would let him come here now, I’ll answer for his good conduct.”

The Deacon hesitated, but Miss Merton

pleaded, and eloquently, too, for she felt that a soul's salvation lay in the answer she should receive to her petition.

"You'd make a good preacher, Miss Merton." And he drew his hand over his eyes. "It's hard resisting you. In fact, I guess I'll have to yield. If mother's willing, he may come to-night."

"You'll never repent this good deed, Deacon—never, never. The boy must be good in such a home as this—so neat, quiet, and well-arranged. I'll answer for him."

"Where are those trousers I laid off last week, wife—those gray ones? They are pretty good yet—only thin about the seat, and out at the knees. I guess, between you, you could get the boy a decent pair out of them."

"Oh! yes, indeed, father; I could cut them over, and turn the fronts to the back. Yes, indeed; I'll get them as soon as I've put away the things."

Just at evening, Willie came for his jacket; and words cannot express his joy at learning

he was henceforth to live under the same roof with his idolized teacher.

“Oh! I’ll be so good,” he said. “Do tell me what I can do for you, Mrs. Gray.” And almost without waiting for an answer, he ran out to the shed, and brought in the night’s wood, and split the chips, and drew the water, and filled the kettle, and fed the pigs, and brought in the eggs.

“Can you milk, Willie? The Deacon generally does, but he’s late to-night, and will be tired when he comes in.”

“Oh! yes, ma’am, I guess I can.” And he soon brought the swimming pails into the dairy.

The snow-white biscuit, the quivering custard pie, the mellow cider-apple sauce, the golden butter, and the fragrant tea, were just placed on the neatly laid table, when the Deacon’s step was heard.

“Waiting?” said he. “Well, sit down; I must do my chores first.”

“They’re all done,” said Willie, respectfully; “I did them.”

"Ah! you did them, did you? Well, then, we'll have tea."

Mrs. Gray had placed an extra plate by the side of the school-mistress, and now motioned Willie to sit there.

"I can wait; I always do," said he, hanging back.

"Nobody waits at my table, when there's room," said the Deacon. "Sit down, boy, and remember that is your place hereafter."

It seemed to Willie that he had suddenly stepped into another world—everybody so kind, everything so free.

Sunday morning came. Willie was up before sunrise, doing the necessary chores; and then Mrs. Gray hung up an old blanket in one corner of the woodshed, and gave him a pail of warm water, some soap, a sponge, and towel, and told him to strip himself to the skin, and wash himself thoroughly. And then, just when the boy was holding his dirty, ragged shirt in his hand, and hesitating to put it on, a sweet voice said kindly, "You will find your clothes just outside the

blanket, Willie," and then light footsteps ran away.

He peeped out. Sure enough, there was a bran new shirt, the gift of Miss Merton, which she had made in the evenings; the Deacon's trousers, the mended jacket, a pair of neatly-darned socks—some of the Deacon's, that had shrunk—and a pair of good stout shoes, the last a present from the Deacon, who had told Miss Merton and his wife "he wouldn't do things by halves—he'd test the boy thoroughly."

There were many happy little faces in the church that Sabbath morning, but none brighter or more cheerful than William Hendrickson's; and no boy behaved himself better in meeting, either, than did he, reading out of the same book with Miss Merton, kneeling down by her side, and reading the beautiful words of the hymns, as her sweet voice joined the chorus of the choir.

Weeks passed on. The summer time was gone, and with it the dear school-mistress.

"I may never see you again, Willie," she

said tenderly, as she held his hands at parting; “but I hope always to hear a good report of you. The Deacon has promised to write to me occasionally, and I shall expect to hear from you in every letter. I shall never forget you. I shall remember you in my prayers, night and morning. Willie, you will not disappoint me?”

Through his tears the boy sobbed out, “No, no, no. Oh! if you could always be with me.”

“I leave you with a Friend who never forsakes. Willie, God is with you.”

She was gone, and it seemed to the poor boy that heaven had shut its doors on him for ever. But he manfully struggled with himself; and though it was not so easy to be good under the new teacher that came, he was good, remembering ever his promise.

I should like to follow his career step by step; but my story is growing long, and I can only tell you the results of his continued efforts after knowledge and goodness. He became so near and dear to Deacon Gray,

that when he was sixteen he adopted him ; his only little blue-eyed son having been called to the “other side of the river.” He went first to the academy, then to college, then to a theological school, and then into the pulpit. Yes ; he whom the country people all said was bound to go to the penitentiary, now preaches the gospel of Christ on every Sabbath day. And the dear teacher, now an aged matron with silvery hair, listens to him, and learns of him. The pupil has become the pastor ; the worst boy in school is now one of the most eloquent preachers, and what is better far, one of the best of men. Verily, “As ye sow, so shall ye reap.”

XII.

THE WORST GIRL IN SCHOOL.

“ SHE’S the worst girl in school, mother.”

“ Be careful how you speak of others, my child. You may be unjust. Sit by me while I tell you about a ‘worst girl in school’ whom I once knew.

“ Near the school-house where I used to go, was an old log cabin, inhabited by a family of the name of Stebbins. They were poor, neglected people, and Joe Stebbins, the father, earned an honest living for his large household as best he could, sometimes clearing land and doing other hard jobs for the neighbouring farmers ; sometimes hunting and fishing. He had five boys and one girl, Rachel, the youngest but one of the children.

“ Rachel was the pet with her father and brothers and was almost always with them,

both in work and play. If they felled trees, she gathered the brush; if they boiled maple sugar, she carried the sap; if they hunted, she watched for the game; if they fished, she fished as well; and not one of them but liked her for a comrade and a helpmeet, since she was the readiest, swiftest, and merriest among them. She was the sharpest-witted, too. 'Risk Rachel,' her father would say, 'she'll find a way in the dark if anybody can.'

The wild, adventurous, out-of-door life which she led made her strong and fearless, and led her to acquire all a boy's accomplishments. She could climb a tree, row a boat, swim a stream, play at ball, and pitch quoits. Of course, all the little girls who, like me, had been brought up within doors on sampler-work, fine knitting, and patch-work, and whose out-door experiences and capabilities were limited to the gathering of a few berries in the pasture or a few apples in the orchard, looked upon Rachel with horror. A wild Indian girl would have shocked our ideas of propriety less.

“When school kept, Rachel sometimes went; perhaps because other children went, perhaps her father had some idea that it is a good thing to know how to read and write. She was very irregular in her attendance, always late, and quite regardless of the rules of the school. The teacher often punished her, but to little purpose; at any attempt to make her ashamed she would smile as at an absurdity—no discipline had any apparent effect on her. The teacher disliked her, the scholars shrank from and avoided her, and agreed in calling her ‘the worst girl in school;’ not one of us would play with her. When we made up a grand ring for ‘poison,’ or ‘hunt the slipper,’ no one would take her hand, and she was sometimes told ‘Go away, Rachel Stebbins; you shan’t play with us.’ Redening with anger, never with shame, she would haughtily answer, ‘I can play by myself,’ and leave us.

“There was a darling little girl, Louisa Morse, the child of a neighbour, whom I sometimes took to school with me. She was only

three years old, and very prettily dressed, and was a great favourite among the school-children. Some of them could not keep their eyes on their books in lesson-hours for watching her cunning ways, and in recess a crowd would gather round her, giving her little presents and begging her to kiss them or go with them. As I led her to and from school I considered her my charge, and was quite proud and consequential therefor.

“One day, on looking round from the play in which I had been engaged, I saw, to my surprise and dismay, the little Louisa sitting contented and happy with Rachel Stebbins, and holding in her chubby hands the prettiest tame white dove. I called to her ‘Louise; Louise!’ but she did not heed. The dove filled all her thoughts. She patted it, and kissed it, and laid her fat rosy cheek against its soft feathers.

“‘Louise, come right away!’ I screamed, but she still patted and kissed the dove, and then in the excess of her love and gratitude, turned and kissed Rachel. This was too

much. I left my play, ran to her and snatched her up, bore her away, still holding the dove.

“‘Here, give Rachel her dove,’ I said, turning back.

“‘No, let her keep it; she loves it so,’ said Rachel.

“‘No, she shan’t, she shan’t have anything that’s yours,’ I roughly answered. ‘You’ll be coming after her and making a fuss over her, if she has,’ and I forced the dove from the crying child and threw it towards Rachel.

“Rachel’s anger rose. ‘Why, you’re worse than a bear,’ she said, as she fixed on me a look which expressed more horror than I had ever felt for her. I doubt not she then thought *me* ‘the worst girl in school.’ I was very selfish and cruel, and Rachel was neither.

“She called her bird, which flew to her at once, and petting and fondling it, carried it home, perched on her forefinger, happy and good-natured again at seeing how it loved her. All her pets (and she had plenty of them)

loved her, everybody at home loved her well, and as she loved them fondly and dearly, she had enough to make her happy notwithstanding the ill treatment she received from her schoolmates."

"Why, mother, Rachel don't seem to me very bad," said Mary, the listening child.

"Because I show her to you in her true light. Those who went to school with her, looked at her with prejudice, and therefore were long in finding out her real character. You must be prejudiced against the girl of whom you lately spoke, and that is why I tell you of Rachel. You may be doing her injustice. Remember that injustice and unkindness are ruinous to weak and sensitive natures. Call a person bad, or treat him as if bad, and you too often make him so. Had not Rachel's nature been strong and self-reliant, the treatment she received in school was enough to have made her 'the worst girl there.' Let me tell you more of her.

"One day two roguish girls determined to have a little fun in caricaturing the teacher,

who was plain at the best. She had a thin face, large features and a heavy scowl, and was so short-sighted that she could not mend a pen without spectacles. At noontime they went into the empty school-house, locked the door and drew the oddest-looking picture on the black-board. It was a portrait of the teacher which any one would have recognized, but such exaggerated features! such pursed-up lips! such a scowl, portentous enough! and such monstrous spectacles and pen! It was too comical. No one could look at it with entire gravity. But the girls stifled their laughter while they were drawing it for fear that they might be discovered.

“‘ Hark! what’s that? Somebody’s trying the door! What *shall* we do?’ they whispered.

“All was still, and the frightened girls breathed freely again. But only for a moment. A window flew up with a bang. They turned, and Rachel Stebbins was making rapid progress into the school-room, head and shoulders already in

“‘What a hateful thing! just like her; always where she ain’t wanted!’ they exclaimed. ‘Now just go right away, Rachel Stebbins. And you tell of us, if you dare!’

“‘Dare! of course I dare! What could you do to me? I ain’t afraid of you. But I’ve no thoughts of telling. Make all the scare-crows you please for all of me,’ answered Rachel, and going to her seat, found a knife belonging to one of her brothers which he had sent her for, and departed from the school-house as she came.

“The girls at the black-board fretted and scolded about her visit in strong language, and conjectured all the trouble that it might possibly make, still they were so much pleased with their drawing and so intent on fun at all hazards that they would not rub it out, but finished it up to their entire satisfaction. Then having assured themselves that no one was near, they softly unlocked the school-house door, and started off on a walk in great apparent innocence. No one but Rachel had seen them at their

mischief or had mistrusted that any was brewing.

“The teacher had no sooner opened the school in the afternoon than she saw her portrait on the black-board, and became very angry. The scholars saw it and held their hands to their mouths, and shook and tittered, and thus irritated the teacher more.

“‘Who drew this pretty picture?’ she asked in a simpering way, trying to cover her mortification. ‘I should like to become acquainted with the promising artist.’

“No one answered.

“‘Can any one introduce me to the artist?’ she inquired, still simpering.

“The children gave up all attempts at self-restraint and laughed out in a grand roar. This would not do. The teacher yielded to her anger and putting her foot down firmly, demanded to know who had done the shameful thing.

“Then *I* did a shameful thing—the meanest thing I ever did in my life. My cheeks are even now burning with shame as I tell you

of it, but it is a part of my story—it is a part of God's record, and must stand there for ever, so I will confess it, and confess along with it, my hearty shame and sorrow. I have told you how I wronged Rachel in tearing the little Louisa from her. After that, I hated her, it is so natural to hate those whom we wrong, and my hate made me ready, almost eager to injure her again."

"Why, mother, how could you?" interrupted Mary, her countenance expressing her surprise and pain.

"I followed my own evil impulses. My heart was not right with God. I had a heart of stone. I had not yet been 'born again,' and you know how emphatically Christ has said, '*Ye must be born again.*'"

"What did you do, mother, that was so bad?"

"In answer to the teacher's demand I pertly and with great self-satisfaction answered that I saw Rachel Stebbins crawling into the school-house window at noon-time and I saw nobody else near the school-house

after the teacher left it until she returned. This was true, but what weight was there in this fact, since I had been in the neighbourhood of the school-house but a few minutes. A multitude might have entered and left it without my knowledge, as I had been at a great distance during nearly the whole noon-time. This I did not tell, and the teacher was too angry to give the case a fair examination. Rachel Stebbins gave her a great deal of trouble; she was prejudiced against her, as I have before said, and disliked her, with the rest of us. She summoned her to the middle of the floor, and thus addressed her:

“‘A lady-like act crawling in at the window. Are you a monkey or an ourang-outang to choose that mode of entry rather than going in at the door?’

“The idea of a monkey and an ourang-outang made the children roar again.

“‘I don’t wonder the children laugh at you,’ the teacher continued to Rachel, ‘but you’ve no shame.’

“Rachel stood with her clear blue eyes fixed on the teacher, coolly watching her expression, waiting for what she might say or do. There certainly was nothing in her appearance which evinced shame. What had she done to be ashamed of? She knew no wrong in climbing to places where she could not walk to them. She had found her skill in climbing useful and had learned to value it. The teacher regarded her too much like a wild animal to think it a fact worthy of notice that she had climbed in at the window, instead of going in at the door, and proceeded to question her as to what she had wanted in the school-house. The teacher pronounced the story improbable, and insisted that she should confess the truth, threatening punishment.

“‘I have told you the truth,’ said Rachel, ‘and you do not believe me; but I am willing you should punish me if you want.’

“The teacher was for a moment disconcerted by Rachel’s calm and inflexible manner. Then she began anew: ‘Tell me, Ra-

chel Stebbins, did you draw the picture on the black-board.

“ ‘No,’ said Rachel, bluntly.

“ ‘Then who did?’

“ Rachel’s lips were closed.

“ ‘Who did?’ more emphatically.

“ Rachel’s lips were still closed. The guilty girls trembled with excitement and fear. Could they have seen Rachel’s firm, noble look, they would have had no fear of her betraying them, but her back was towards them.

“ The teacher varied her question. ‘ Do you know who drew it?’

“ Rachel still looked quietly in the teacher’s face, gave herself a moment for thought, and deliberately answered, ‘ Yes, I know.’

“ Then tell me.’

“ Rachel waited again before she answered, ‘ I’m not a tell-tale.’

“ ‘But you *must* tell,’ said the teacher.

“ Rachel said nothing, feeling a ‘*must not*’ in herself far stronger than the teacher’s ‘*must*.’

“The teacher repeated her ‘must’ and waited. ‘You will not tell?’ she said.

“‘No,’ said Rachel. She used no ornaments of speech.

“‘Then I shall punish you,’ said the teacher.

“Rachel did not shrink nor tremble. She had learned to bear pain without cries or complaint when little more than an infant. When the teacher took her hand to ferrule it, she held it entirely still, and though the keen anguish drove all the blood out of her face, even from her lips, she moved not a muscle, but still kept her eyes fixed on the teacher with a look of superiority strange in so young a person. She *was* superior. We all saw and felt it. I knew the teacher felt it, for she trembled from head to foot, and going to her desk, laid her head upon her hand and wept.

“As Rachel took her seat, I met her eyes turned upon me with no expression of anger or ill-will, but, as it seemed to me, that she might see how I looked after such meanness

as I had been guilty of. She did not even glance at the timid cowardly creatures who could sit still and see her, innocent as she was, receive the punishment they deserved. She no doubt despised them, but she would not wrong her own nature by betraying them."

"Wasn't she noble, mother? I should like to know such a girl," said Mary, deeply interested.

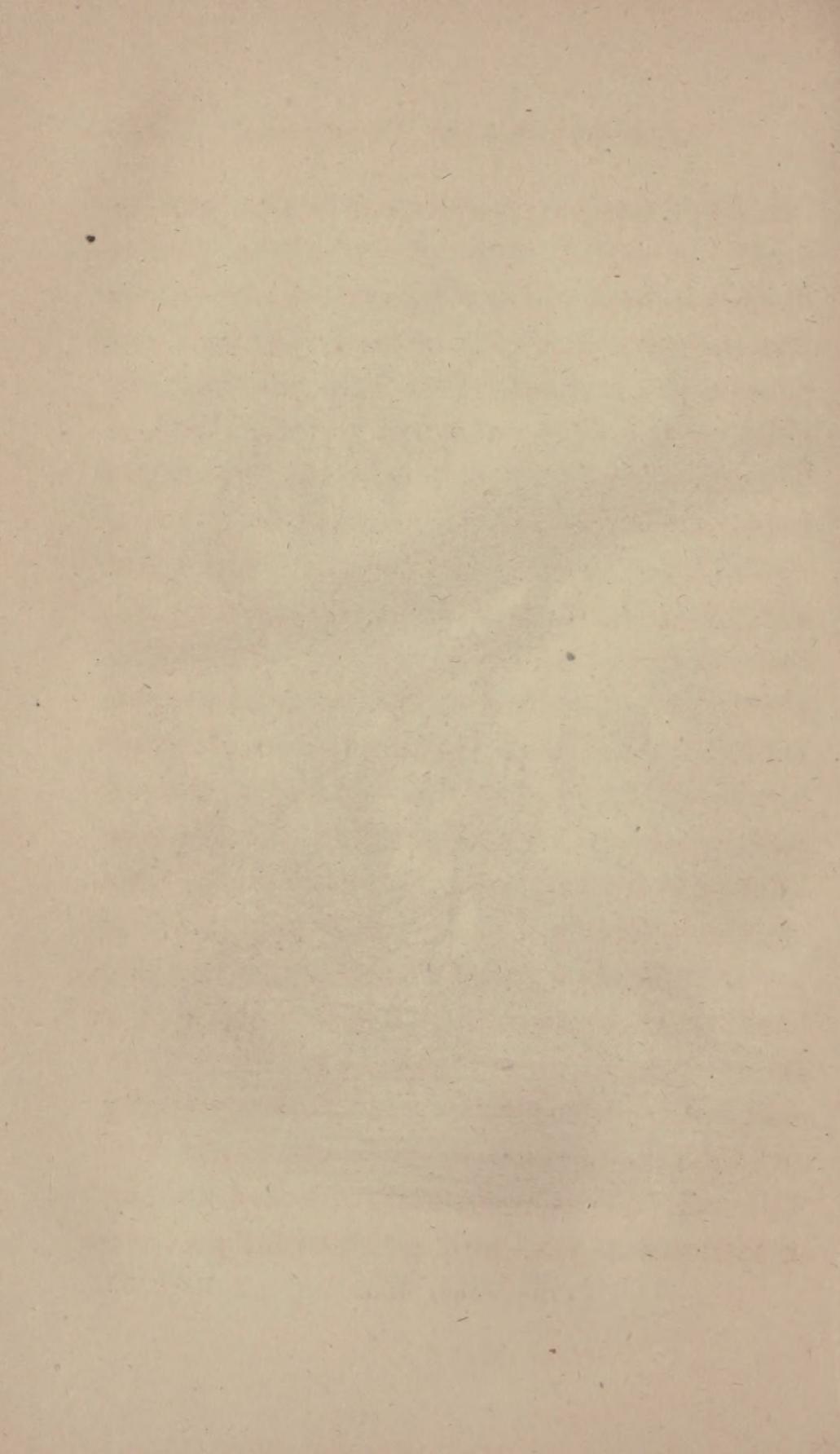
"I doubt whether there are many such. Few persons in these days of ease and indulgence have such healthy nerves and strong powers of endurance, such firm purpose and self-reliance as nature gives to the children who are reared on her bosom and dwell in her haunts. And we do not always recognize these strong noble beings when we meet them. We look at their manners and dress, and turn away. Who knows but 'the worst girl in your school' is one of them? Remember that Rachel was 'the worst girl in our school.'"

"I can't bear to hear you call her so."

“She bore that name for years, because we did not know her. I am glad that we knew her at last. It does one so much good to find worth and nobleness in others. It is so strengthening and refreshing. I have more to tell you about Rachel. Near our school-house was a river, and in one place where it was narrow, a tree had been felled for a bridge over it. One day a party of school-girls, myself among them, crossed the river upon it, and were busy playing by the farther shore, when some one of us looking up espied little Louisa Morse coming to us. She was already on the fallen tree, midway from shore to shore, her hands extended going up and down as her footing grew unsteady and unsafe. Half a dozen of us unwisely shouted in our alarm for her safety, ‘Why, Louisa! Louisa! go back! go back!!’

“The child was frightened, and turned to obey us. Her foot slipped, and she fell. Fortunately she was caught by a cluster of limbs just at the surface of the water. But the river banks being very high, the tree was





far above the water, and poor Louisa was beyond our reach. We saw it all in perfect dismay—no shouting then—we were breathless in our agony. It had been easier to die ourselves than see that beautiful darling child perish there, and no one to help her. Though she was borne up by the limbs and held on to them well, the waters were bearing against her, and we were in mortal fear lest something might lead her, baby as she was, to loose her hold.

“I thought of Rachel, injured, noble, heroic Rachel. She could save her if any one could. ‘Rachel!’ I called. She appeared on the opposite shore. What brought her there I never knew. She saw our terror—followed our eyes to where they rested on the child in her peril. She had not to wait to cast aside bonnet nor shoes, nor needless drapery, for she was bareheaded, barefooted, and thinly clad, but springing into the river, swam rapidly and bravely to the side of our darling.

“‘Ah, Weeza! Weeza!’ we heard her say in softened tones, smiling beautifully as she

spoke, 'put your little arms round my neck, Weeza.'

"How I trembled for fear that the child would draw back and refuse to go with Rachel, as I had taught her to shun her, and had never let her go near her since the day when I forced away from her the pet-dove. I called to her, 'Louisa, put your arms round *good* Rachel's neck.'

"The child saw that Rachel's face was to be trusted—perhaps she remembered the pretty pet dove and the smiles that Rachel always gave her when she caught her eye. She put up her arms, first one and then the other, and clasped Rachel firmly round the neck. 'Now jump on to my back and you shall have a grand ride.' The child obeyed, and even laughed, when Rachel began to make for the shore with her precious burden.

"She had reached the water's edge—had climbed the steep bank—I saw the child clapping her hands and laughing as she shouted to us, and Rachel putting back her tangled

curls and wringing her wet clothes, and then I saw no more. I fainted. The excitement and the distress had been too much for me.

“Of course, I knew nothing of what happened while I lay senseless, but I was told that the girls with me were as much terrified when I sank down beside them, as they had been when Louisa fell into the water—that they had called to Rachel as I had before done—that when she had put Louisa in a safe place and obtained her promise to remain there, she had come to my aid. Though she had never seen a person faint before, she had heard of fainting, and the use of cold water in it. But where was any water to be had there? Water enough in the river, but it ran so far below the banks as to be inaccessible. Rachel knew every brook and spring in all the neighbourhood, and it was not long before she had brought water in a cup made of her hands, and bathed my brow and wet my lips. I opened my eyes to find her bending above me. They filled with tears

as I drew her down nearer and pressed a grateful kiss upon her cheek.

“I knew and felt and acknowledged thereafter that Rachel Stebbins was the *noblest* girl in our school.”

XIII.

THE SHIPWRECK.

“AUNTY, I wish you would tell me a tale.”

“Shall it be a true tale, Miriam?”

“Yes, please, aunty ; I love true tales best. Many of my books are very pretty, but then they are not true ; and I often wish the little boys and girls did live and did say all that is put down.”

“I am afraid, Miriam, that what boys and girls do say would not make many pretty books ; still, you are quite right to like true stories best. The most wonderful stories are in that book of truth, written for our learning, and every word there is quite true. But I am not going to tell you a Bible story now, but a very true one. ‘The Story of Ada.’ ”

“Not many months ago, Miriam, while walking to the Sabbath-school, I overtook one of our lady teachers. A little stranger was with her, and the lady said, ‘This is my little friend Ada, and she has asked to come with me to the school.’”

“How old was she, aunty?”

“About eight years old, dear; and she had a merry yet gentle look. Ada came and sat down in my class, and read verses in turn with the children. She did not look idly about, but she seemed like one who was really digging for the gold hid in the precious book. I think she had found *some*, and so was longing, like the miner, to dig deeper and deeper for more. When you are quite sure the gold is there, Miriam, it is worth while to dig; and the child who finds Jesus in the Bible secures the best riches.”

“And do you think, aunty, that Ada had found Jesus?”

“Yes, Miriam, for every one saw that she was trying to be *like* Jesus; she was obedient and gentle, and very much loved her Bible,

and would find any reference very quickly. For many Sabbaths Ada came with her little Bible to my class ; and then she said ‘ Good-bye,’ and we saw her no more.

“ Her parents lived far away, and she went to spend a few months with a kind aunt till her dear mamma was better. When this visit was over, Ada was to go home in a steamer. She was not the least afraid to go alone, having before found it a very pleasant journey. Indeed, if you were to look over those splendid vessels, and see the cozy little beds, and the saloon, with its pictures and mirrors, and its velvet seats, I think you would like to go too.

“ It was Monday afternoon, in the month of June, that her aunt took Ada to the steamship, and put her under the care of the stewardess, who promised to be very kind and watchful over her.

“ Some of the passengers, too, looked kindly on the fair child, and one lady said, ‘ She will be a sweet little companion for me, for I have just left my own dear girls ; I

will not leave her till she meets her dear papa.'

"The good-byes were all said, the last looks met, and the steamer passed swiftly on through the waters. It was a sunny evening; even the wild restless waves seemed hushed to rest, and the sea breeze was only as a gentle whisper. Many happy groups were walking up and down the decks or sitting on the camp-stools. There were parents and brothers and sisters, and many a wondering child who had never been on the sea before. There were strange-looking foreigners, too, going to see the wild mountains and lochs, and they talked of the beauties in their own more sunny climes. Ada quite enjoyed looking at the sea and the wild birds flitting by. Soon the setting sun touched the waters, and they seemed a golden pathway to the throne-like cloud of purple far away."

"What did Ada do next, aunty?"

"The stewardess came for her, and she went down to the ladies' cabin. It was

rather crowded; but there was a snug birth for Ada. There were many children undressing, too, and it was a very merry scene; but amid all those strangers Ada was not ashamed of Jesus. She knelt down and prayed (which many are ashamed to do;) but she was in that place as a little light.

“It soon became quite dark, past midnight, when suddenly there was a fearful crash, and sea-water came rushing into the cabin. Terrible cries wildly told, ‘We are on the rocks! she must sink!’ Ada soon awoke, and oh what a frightful scene of agony and confusion met her sight! Fathers crying out, and mothers trying to dress the frightened little ones, and all rushing up the stairs.

“Poor Ada! she had no papa or mamma near, to care for her, to try to save her, or even tell her what to do. But, in the midst of all that terror, Ada calmly knelt again, and prayed to her heavenly Father; and when the faithful stewardess came to see for

her little charge, she found her on her knees. Happy Ada! she knew under whose care there were shelter and safety; and now she found the Lord Jesus was very near his trusting child.

“The stewardess put a shawl round Ada, and carried her on the deck. It was a fearful moment. There were loud cries of ‘The boats! the boats! five minutes and she will sink! there’s no chance!’ The boats were let down, and many, too many, crowded into them. The boats were overturned, and all were struggling in the water.

Soon the steamer was sinking fast, and from the slanting decks many fell into the sea. There was trembling agony, and many a despairing cry for help; but all in vain.

“The last time darling Ada was seen, she was standing on the deck by the stewardess. A sailor well remembers hearing her last words, ‘I am not afraid!’ Then came another crash, a fearful shriek, and the vessel sank with all on board in the dark waters. Where was Ada now? A few moments’

struggle in those waves, and then her spirit passed, as I doubt not, to the quiet haven on Canaan's happy shore. Long ago the promise was given, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,' Isaiah xlivi. 2. Surely Ada found it true when she calmly said, 'I am not afraid.' "

"And were any more drowned, dear aunt?"

"Yes, dear, more than seventy. Many more must have perished; but a lady on the shore happened to be wakeful and restless that night. Looking out of the window, she saw the vessel get on the rocks. She ran down to the village and awoke the fishermen, who put off in their boats and saved many lives. One gentleman got a plank, and tried to save his only child by holding his clothes with his teeth; but another seized the plank, and the poor struggling child was drowned. Two little boys who were saved lost their dear papa, mamma, and sisters. One noble little fellow, Archibald, was going home with his tutor, who tried to help him to get to the rocks; but he said, 'Oh, never mind me; as-

sist the ladies.' One young lady's life was saved by her having learned (when at school) to float on her back. She had presence of mind to do so till picked up. A dear orphan child was returning from school, with her uncle, aunt, and cousins; all were drowned but this desolate child.

"When the sun rose, the tide washed ashore many of the dead. Their bodies were all laid side by side in one large room of death. There were seen fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, all in the sleep of death. There were three lovely children, whom no one knew or claimed, till it was found their parents had sunk in the vessel.

"The body of Ada was laid there too. When her dear papa came to meet his child, there were no springing feet, no loving kisses ready for him; but there was a smile on Ada's cold cheek. The father tried to comfort himself with the thought that his darling one had reached a better home, and that she was waiting for him there, to dwell for ever, where there shall be no more death and 'no more sea.'

“Aunty’s true tale is finished now, Miriam. You too must die ; would you like to say with Ada, ‘I am not afraid ?’ It is sin that makes us fear to die ; ‘The sting of death is sin.’ But the Lord Jesus bore our sins in his own body on the cross. The sting of death pierced him instead of those who believed on him. Look now, dear child, at him who gave himself for you, and shed his precious blood, which can wash you whiter than snow.

“Look now, look every day, and then, when you are dying, whether it be among the wild sea-waves, or on a quiet pillow, you will joyfully say, ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I will fear no evil*, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’”

XIV.

NO TIME LIKE PRESENT TIME.

“ALICE, are those button-holes not made yet? Do finish them, dear, before dark. What are you doing now?”

Close to the window of a large, though poorly furnished kitchen, sat Alice Dale, an intelligent-looking girl, of about eleven or twelve years old. A slate and sheet of note-paper lay on a table before her; and, bending over them so that her face was almost hidden, she was writing busily, regardless of a cold draught which blew in through a broken pane. On her mother’s repeating her question, she exclaimed, half petulantly: “O mother, I’d thought of such a nice fresh sentence, and you’ve driven it right out of my head.”

“Have I, dear?” said the somewhat over-indulgent Mrs. Dale, “I’m sorry for that; but what are you writing? I forget.”

“Our last Sunday’s sermon;—all I can recollect of it at least. I’m copying it out from my slate on to a nice piece of paper, for I want to take it to the Sunday-school to-morrow. Won’t Miss Partridge be surprised to find what a lot I’ve remembered?”

“No doubt she will, dear. But don’t forget those button-holes, pray. I promised Mrs. Allen I’d take home the shirts to-night by eight o’clock; and I’ve still got a bit of stitching to do when you’ve done your part.”

“Yes, mother, I know. I’ll see about them in a minute.”

“Very well, then, that’ll do, dear. I wouldn’t hurry you on any account, only you see it’s almost getting dusk already. The evenings are becoming so long now! Well, I must be going out. Take care of the place till I come back, Alice. I shan’t be long gone, I dare say, though. You’ll find a candle in that cupboard, if you want one.”

And Mrs. Dale put on her bonnet and left the house. It was Saturday evening, and she had some marketing to do against the mor-

row. Alice's "minute" was extending, meanwhile, into five, and the five into ten. She fully intended to obey her mother, but she could not make up her mind to leave her writing *just yet*. There was no immediate hurry, she told herself, about those button-holes. If necessary, they could be finished off by candle-light. The shades of evening were beginning already to steal on, when a loud double knock at the house door obliged her to lay aside her pencil, smooth down her frock and hair, and hasten up the kitchen stairs.

The house Mrs. Dale occupied was not her own. In order to save herself the expense of rent, she moved about from place to place, taking charge of empty houses; and thus, though the knock sounded very loud, echoing through the empty hall, Alice was not at all startled by it, for she guessed immediately that some one had come to inspect the "desirable family residence" which her mother was at present keeping. Her conjecture proved correct, for, standing on the door-step, were two ladies and a gentleman, who politely re-

quested to see the house. Pleased to act as "show-woman," Alice smilingly admitted them, recognising the pleasant-looking elderly man as Mr. Ainsworth, a surgeon, whose carriage was constantly driving about the neighbourhood. The young ladies, she believed, were his daughter and niece, and she knew them also by sight so well that she quite expected to hear them exclaim, "Why, are you not a little girl we meet very frequently out of doors?" They said nothing of the kind, however; though she had the satisfaction of hearing one lady whisper to the other in reference to herself, "She looks very clever. I like her bright face."

"A capital house, a capital house," said Mr. Ainsworth, returning into the hall, after duly inspecting the upper rooms. "I shall certainly go to the agent's to inquire about the rent, and if it's at all reasonable I shouldn't be surprised if I took it at the half-quarter."

"Papa, papa," cried the elder of the young ladies, catching hold of his arm, "don't go yet. We haven't looked at the kitchens!"

"I declare I'd quite forgotten them, ranges, dressers, and all! Well, my good girl, I suppose you can let us see them?"

"Yes, sir," said Alice with alacrity. "Only, please," she added, as she showed the way down stairs into the kitchen, "this is where mother and I live." "And a nice, tidy room it is," cried Mr. Ainsworth's niece. "I dare say it is you who make it so." Alice smiled, but felt in reality somewhat abashed; she could take but little credit to herself on the score of tidiness.

"The kitchen range," said the gentleman, stooping down and looking at it with a critical air, "is out of order, I suppose, Helen: ranges in empty houses always are."

"I don't know about that, papa; but really it is getting so dark I can hardly see this one. Can you, Maria?"

Alice immediately lighted a candle to enable Mr. Ainsworth and his daughter to inspect the fireplace, and while they were doing so, Maria addressed various questions to their active and obliging little show-woman.

“So,” said the young lady, “you don’t attend day-school any longer, do you? And how’s that?”

“I’m going to an evening school by-and-by, ma’am. But mother can’t spare me to go to the day-school now, because she wants me to help her with her needle-work.”

“And she gets her livelihood by needle-work, I suppose? Is that (glancing towards Alice’s slate and paper) something that you have been writing? You seem to write very nicely, I think. I suppose I mustn’t see what’s written there?”

With a blushing face Alice handed her the slate, and after reading a few lines the young lady exclaimed: “Why this is Mr. Morgan’s last Sabbath morning’s sermon, isn’t it? How clever! Uncle, do look. Helen! I’m sure you’ll be pleased with this. How did you manage to write so well?”

“I don’t know, ma’am,” said Alice simply. “I go to Mr. Morgan’s Sabbath-school, and Miss Partridge, our teacher, talks about his sermons sometimes.”

“Ah, but that wouldn’t make you do it, if you were not clever. Helen, do just read it. Oh, I forgot! I don’t suppose you can; you’re just like an old woman for seeing so ill by candle-light.”

“I am, indeed,” said Miss Ainsworth, smiling good-humouredly; “so I’m afraid it’s no use my attempting to read it. I should much like to do so though, for Mr. Morgan’s sermon was a very good one, and it is very nice to be able to remember it so well.”

“Very nice, very nice indeed,” said the doctor pleasantly. “But you don’t write all day, I suppose, my good girl? You stitch wristbands, and sew shirts, and do all those kind of useful things, don’t you? For I think I heard you say your mother was a sempstress.”

“Yes, sir, she is, and I help her. But I like writing much better.”

“Oh, I dare say *she* does,” said the injudicious Maria; “everybody can do plain needle-work, but not every——”

“Everybody can do plain needle-work, can

they, Mrs. Puss?" cried her uncle. "I'm not so sure of that, for *I* can't. I dare say this good girl here, however much writing she may have in hand, wouldn't be in a hurry to employ me to stitch wristbands in her stead? I really am modest enough to think she could do it better than I could myself."

The idea of Mr. Ainsworth's stitching wristbands tickled Alice's fancy greatly. She did not quite know whether she might venture to laugh, so she prudently put up her apron before her widening mouth. "What! crying?" said the doctor, looking back at her as he was mounting the kitchen stairs; "what's the matter, eh? sorry you can't engage me for a pupil?" And then when her mirth could no longer be restrained, he shook his head very gravely, and telling her that he looked upon laughter as a very bad symptom, and that he must give her something to make her well, he slipped a sixpence into her hand.

As soon as her visitors were gone, Alice returned to her writing. She *must* finish it now, she said, for if the stranger lady had

been so charmed with it in its rough imperfect state what would not her dear Miss Partridge say when she saw it neatly written out on paper, with the spelling corrected, and the text set down in fair characters at the top of the page? She had just completed it by the time her mother returned home, but the button-holes were still untouched. Mrs. Dale did not scold much; she was pleased to hear that her daughter had been praised, and hoped, besides, that if they worked hard, the shirts would yet be finished by nine o'clock. They did work hard, but ten had long struck before the last needleful of cotton was broken off. It was too late then to take the shirts to Mrs. Allen, and they could only trust that that lady would not be angry.

The next morning, when Alice went to the Sabbath-school, she found that the usual teacher of her class was absent, and that her place, curiously enough, was supplied by Miss Ainsworth. The latter greeted her pupil with a kind smile of recognition, but it was not long ere she had to call her to order for

whispering. “School is not the place for talking,” she observed, when the lessons were over; “and still less for quarrelling, as I am afraid two of you (turning to Alice and another girl) were doing. But pray, Alice—your name *is* Alice, I think—have you brought that piece of writing with you that my cousin saw yesterday? You meant, I dare say, to show it to Miss Partridge: will you let me see it instead?”

Alice proudly produced it, but while she was handing it to her teacher, Sarah, the girl with whom she had been disputing, broke in with, “Teacher, it wasn’t my fault we were talking. But I lent her a pencil, and she’s lost it, teacher.”

“Yes; but I’ve bought you another,” said Alice; “and meant to have brought it with me to-day.”

“Well, but you shouldn’t have lost mine. She’s got a hole in her bag, teacher, and the pencil dropped through. I told her long ago she ought to mend it. She puts off things terrible, teacher.”

Miss Ainsworth read on as if she had heard nothing. When she had finished, however, she called Alice to her and said; “It is very nicely written, indeed; very nicely. And now I can only hope you won’t forget one thing,—to act up to the good advice you have written down. I don’t know whether you are in the habit of putting off your little duties or not, but if you are, don’t forget the words of your text. They are very solemn words, my dear; but they can be applied to small things as well as great.”

She rose, and the class broke up; but Alice lingered a moment behind the rest, looking, with rather mortified feelings, at the text she herself had written down but a few short hours before: “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation.”
(2 Cor. vi. 2.)

“Now is the accepted time.”

Alice did not at all like to have these words turned against herself, but she experienced their truth to her cost. Through trusting to the *by-and-by*, she had obliged her

mother to break her word to Mrs. Allen, and this lady (who had been disappointed before by Mrs. Dale's dilatoriness) now declared that she could employ her no longer. Nor was this the only evil consequence. Mr. Allen was a house agent, and had the power of placing Mrs. Dale and her daughter in unoccupied houses; but when the one which they were at present keeping was let, he refused to do any more for them, so great a feeling against them had his wife excited in his mind.

Mrs. Dale had, therefore, no alternative but to take a room in the neighbourhood, and Alice thought she should like to live in a lodgings, after having been accustomed to inhabit great cheerless kitchens—kitchens which made her mother's furniture appear so very poor and scanty.

The Dales were obliged, of course, to move out the same day on which Mr. Ainsworth, the new tenant, moved in; but they were, as usual, rather behind-hand; and it was late in the evening when Alice finally departed

to their humble lodging, bearing with her a bundle of odds and ends, and a bandbox containing an obstreperous kitten.

“O mother, mother!” she cried, running into the close little back room which, for the present, was to be her home, “here I am after you at last. So you came here all safe, and saw after the moving in of the furniture.”

“Yes, dear,” said Mrs. Dale, who was shaking her head over a cracked looking-glass; “and a pretty ricketty cart it was my poor things were brought in, too! Dear, dear! how crowded the room does look; there’s scarce space to swing a cat in it.”

“Well, Muff doesn’t want to be swung, I’m sure,” said Alice, laughing. “O mother, he was so naughty all the way as I brought him along. He broke a hole in your band-box, and there he kept poking his paw through it, and making all the people laugh whom I met. Do you know Mrs. Faulkner, Mr. Ainsworth’s old servant, said he was the prettiest kitten she ever saw, and she should like to buy him, if I didn’t want him?”

"I wish you had let her have him then, for I'm sure this room here isn't big enough to keep a kitten in."

"O mother? Poor little Muff, I couldn't bear to part with him. But what do you think I've discovered? Mr. Ainsworth's got a servant who's niece to Mrs. Cobb, our landlady. She is under Faulkner, and helps her with the cooking, 'cause Faulkner is getting now so very old, you know. She,—Jane, I mean,—came just after you left, and she seems a very nice person indeed."

"Is she young, dear?"

"Oh! no, not young; at least eight years older than I am, I should think. But you don't seem to care. I thought you would have thought it so very curious."

"I'm tired and stupid, dear, that's all," said Mrs. Dale, forcing a smile; "I want my tea, I think. Alice, before you take off your bonnet, you must go and do a little marketing for me. We owe a little bill at Streeter's, so you can take the sovereign Mr. Ainsworth gave me for cleaning the house—"

“Where is the sovereign, mother?”

“I brought it here in your little school-bag, dear. The bag is hanging at the back of that chair.”

“You brought it in my school-bag?”

Alice turned slightly pale, and running for the bag began feeling in it, while her mother calmly continued; “When you pay our bill at Streeter’s, ask them to give you change for the sovereign, and buy a quarter of a pound of their best three-and-sixpenny mixed tea, half a pound——”

“O mother, mother! the sovereign isn’t here, the sovereign isn’t here!”

“Not there! nonsense! it must be. Not a soul has been in the room since I hung that bag on the back of the chair. And before that I had held the bag strings twisted round my fingers as tight as could be. I’m sure the money couldn’t have dropped out, or been taken while I was coming from the square here.”

“Oh, yes, it might; it might have dropped out, for—look, look!” Alice held up the

bag, and showed her mother that it had a hole in it.

Oh, that hole ! Why, had she not mended it weeks ago ? It had cost her the value of a pencil already, and yet, from day to day, she had deferred bestowing upon it the ten minutes' attention it required. Unable to say anything to excuse herself, she hung her head, ashamed and sorry.

"Well, to be sure," said Mrs. Dale, "you're the most tiresome child ! I made certain you'd mended that hole ; and now, if we've lost the money, what shall we do ?"

"Mother," said Alice, tearfully, "I'll run back to the square, and ask Mr. Ainsworth's servants whether the money's been found. Perhaps it fell out before you left the house. And, mother, I've got a penny-three-farthings in my pocket, and even if I don't find the sovereign, I may bring you home a herring, mayn't I, for your supper ? I'm sure you're very tired. But please forgive me !"

"Yes, dear, I do," said Mrs. Dale, stooping down and kissing her daughter.

Alice was really an affectionate girl, and to receive a kiss at such a time touched her very deeply. She felt just then as if she would be willing to do anything for her mother; and, during her walk to the square, she eased her conscience a little by forming a magnanimous resolution.

Her reception at Mr. Ainsworth's house was not of a particularly satisfactory nature. Faulkner came to the door, greeting her with the inquiry, "what she had come bothering after now? She had left some scrubbing brush or other behind her, she supposed!" And even when Alice had explained her errand, the old servant displayed no sympathy. "Sovereign! No, *she'd* seen no sovereign lying about anywhere. Mrs. Dale must take better care another time." "If you please, ma'am," said Alice, stopping as she was turning away, and speaking with a sudden effort: "Do you—would you—like to have my kitten? Because, if you like, I will sell him—for—for ninepence."

To part with a kitten may, to a child, be a

real act of self-sacrifice, one which no really wise and good person will laugh at or despise ; but Faulkner did not understand the circumstances, and she spoke sharply, even angrily. " Nine-pence for a kitten, indeed ! Very likely I should give that. Why, I could get such a common little tabby as yours is, any day for nothing, and be thanked for taking it, too ! It's no good you're coming here if you want to try and get money out of us, I can tell you. So you may as well be gone." Pride alone prevented Alice from bursting into tears. Ashamed of her own vain attempt to obtain a few pence for her mother, she hurried out of the house, closing the street door behind her. " Alice, Alice," cried a voice proceeding from she knew not where ; and she was standing just in front of the house, gazing round her in some alarm, when the figure of her new friend, Jane, appeared at the top of the area steps.

" Why, child, did you think I was a ghost ? " she cried. " I declare I can see, by the light of that gas lamp, how pale you are. So she's

been giving it to you, has she? She is such a cross thing, and so is my young missus. Don't you have anything to do with them. But I'll always be your friend; and if you'll come and get water for me of a morning from the Square pump, and do little errands of that kind, I'll give you a penny now and then; for I can't abide much running about myself."

"Oh, thank you," said Alice. "I shall be very glad to come, I'm sure. But, if you please, I wanted to know whether you'd seen anything of ——"

"You'd better be gone," interrupted Jane. "We shall catch it if Mrs. Faulkner finds us talking together. Mind you keep clear of her."

Having duly promised that she would, Alice hurried home, bearing with her a heavy heart, for she foresaw that many hardships awaited her mother and herself.

The loss of a sovereign was, indeed, very severely felt by Mrs. Dale, at a time when she was under the somewhat unusual necessity

of paying rent. She happened besides to be remarkably slack of work, and during the course of the ensuing fortnight an old clock and pembroke table disappeared mysteriously from her room, finding their way, it was whispered, to a pawnbroker's. The mother and daughter now restricted themselves to two meals a day, and Muff so far felt the change that he was glad to eat *all* the mice he caught, instead of merely *playing* with the older and tougher ones, as in his palmy days he had been wont to do.

Christmas came, bringing with it a little relief in the shape of presents from Mrs. Dale's wealthier employers; but still the worthy woman's struggles with poverty were great, and one Sabbath (the Sabbath after Christmas Day) Alice was subjected to much ridicule from Jane on account of the shabbiness of her dress.

“Well, I declare,” said the pert young servant girl, who was sweeping in front of her master's door; “that frock of yours looks nice and cool, it's next door to white! I

wonder how many times it's been in the wash-tub? Dear! and here's a big patch on the sleeve. 'A patch that don't match.' I wonder you can go to school in such a trim."

"I wonder you can stand out here in the cold, suffering as you were yesterday with a pain in your chest," retorted Alice.

Well, indeed, might she say so, for the wind blew keenly round Jane's head, which was wholly unprotected, save by the quilling of black lace she was pleased to call a cap.

"Oh, I don't heed the pain in my chest," she cried, "though the parlour folk are always preaching to me about it, and about wearing a bonnet, too. So you're going to school and to church, I suppose? Very good of you, indeed."

"Don't you ever go to church, Jane?"

"No; master thinks I do, but I don't. Well, you needn't look so shocked. I mean to take to going some day, when I'm old, you know. I say, Alice, I knew you'd be passing this way, and I've been looking out for you. Here's something I want your mother to

sell for me," and she placed a silver pencil-case in Alice's hand.

" You want my mother to sell this?"

" Yes, I found it; so it's mine, of course. Don't show it to aunt, or she'll want to have it; but tell your mother she shall have a third of what it sells for. Oh, dear! there's Faulkner calling to me. I must go, I must go, or she'll be so angry."

And Jane retreated into the house, leaving the pencil-case in Alice's hand.

" Alice, dear, you must take back that pencil-case to-morrow, and show it to Miss Ainsworth."

" Oh, mother!"

" Yes, dear, you must. Why didn't you tell me about it before?"

" Because, mother, when I came home from Sarah Martin's last night, it was so late, and you were so sleepy, that I didn't like to, knowing you had to get up at five o'clock this morning. I almost wish Sarah hadn't made me go home with her after morning church, for I wanted so to speak to you about this

nasty pencil case. Oh, Jane oughtn't to have given it to me. I wonder how she came by it?"

"I wonder indeed, dear. I don't like its having an M on this pretty purple stone on the top of it, for 'Maria,' you say, is the name of Miss Ainsworth's cousin, and if it should be hers——"

"Oh, dear, mother, how dreadful that would be! But still I can't bear taking it to Miss Ainsworth, for Jane will be so dreadfully angry. And perhaps she'll go and tell her aunt, Mrs. Cobb, and Mrs. Cobb will then most likely say we must turn out of her house, or do something very spiteful against us indeed."

Mrs. Dale looked grave, for she was already behind-hand with her rent, and if her landlady chose to press her claims, she knew not what she should do. Still, though a woman of little learning, she had one fixed idea in her head, and this was, always to be honest under any circumstances; so, after a momentary pause, she replied, "I tell you it's

right you should go to Miss Ainsworth, dear. I'd go myself if I hadn't been going out charring to-morrow. I didn't like Jane's offering you a basin of dripping the other day. A servant has no right to give away her master's property."

"But, mother, must I go to-morrow?"

"Yes, dear. *There's no time like the present, folks say.*"

"There's no time like the present." These words reminded Alice of a higher saying; for she had not forgotten the text, "Now is the accepted time," and for once she determined to act upon it. The conversation related above took place on Monday evening (immediately after the return of Mrs. Dale from a hard day's charring), and on Tuesday morning Alice found herself knocking, with a beating heart, at Mrs. Ainsworth's door. Her timid rap was unheard or disregarded, and she was about to repeat it, when the door was opened by Miss Ainsworth, who appeared to be on the point of starting for a walk.

"Oh," said the young lady, with a look of

surprise, "I didn't know any one was at the door. Have you been long waiting here?"

"No, ma'am—that is—if you please, I'm come (Alice thought it best to hurry over her communication). I wanted to know about Jane—something——"

"You knew she was ill, then? Come into the hall, Alice. You will be sorry to hear that she is no better, but decidedly worse, to-day. Mr. Ainsworth,—my father,—thinks very badly of her."

"Indeed, ma'am!"

"Yes. On Sunday she was far from well, and my father said he could not suffer her to go out as usual. On our return from church, however, we found she had disobeyed us, and had gone out without leave. The night after she was seized with a violent attack of inflammation of the chest, and now we almost fear whether——"

"Oh, ma'am, is she so very bad?"

"Mr. Ainsworth is much alarmed about her. I was just going to call upon her aunt, to acquaint her with her state. Poor Jane!"

when we urged her to take care of herself, she maintained it would be time enough to do that if she fell really ill; and now you see she put off the time too long."

Alice looked awe-struck. Only two days since Jane had talked of attending to her religious duties *by-and-by*,—when she should be old. She had then deemed it a matter of course that she should live to old age, and now, perhaps, she was dying! It seemed strange, very strange, and solemn too.

"Miss Ainsworth," said Alice, tremulously, "does Jane know, herself, how bad she is?"

"I think not. We have been afraid of saying anything that might excite her. She has asked two or three times for her aunt, Mrs. Cobb, and, as I said before, I was just going to see after her. Poor Jane was a friend of yours, I think?"

"Yes, ma'am, that is—I talk to her sometimes, and mother and I lodge with her aunt. Mother sent me to ask you about—about—this;" and Alice blushingly produced the pencil-case.

“Why, that belongs to my cousin!” cried Miss Ainsworth. “She lost it a few days ago. How *did* you come by it?”

Alice explained; and after listening to her with deep attention, Miss Ainsworth shook her head mournfully, saying it was only too evident that Jane, happening to find the pencil-case lying somewhere about the house, had appropriated it to herself.

“And I suppose, miss,” said Alice, “she was in a hurry to get rid of it, when she found that a search was being made for it.”

“No doubt she was afraid of its being found in her possession. It is probable, though, that she would not have given it to you, had she not thought that she would be unable to go out on Sunday. Well, I am very sorry to hear this about Jane; very sorry, indeed. You, however, have acted very well in this matter, and if my cousin were at home I would call her to thank you for bringing back her pencil-case.”

“It wasn’t my doing, coming here; it was my mother who sent me, ma’am.”

“Well, then,” said Miss Ainsworth, kindly smiling, “you were a good girl to obey your mother. Has she much needle-work in hand at present?”

“No, ma’am. She has so little that she’s been obliged to go out charing, though it spoils her hands sadly. We haven’t had any houses to keep, either, since we offended Mrs. Allen.”

On learning the circumstances of the case, Miss Ainsworth thought the Allens had carried their displeasure decidedly too far, and, knowing that her father was acquainted with them, she considered it not impossible that a few words from him might restore Mrs. Dale to their favour, if indeed she had merely forfeited it by dilatoriness.

Determining, at any rate, to make some inquiries into the needle-woman’s character, with a view to assisting her, Miss Ainsworth smilingly said, “Well, Alice, you’ll be careful another time, I’m sure, not to make your mother break her promise, for of course her employers cannot like that. Here’s a shil-

ling for you to take to her. And now I want you to show me the way to your lodging, for I am anxious to speak to Mrs. Cobb about Jane. Does she know that Jane has been unwell of late?"

"I think not, ma'am. Jane hardly ever comes to see her aunt. I don't think she cares for Mrs. Cobb a bit."

"Then I'm afraid that must be partly Mrs. Cobb's fault. She has not brought her up well, and that perhaps is the reason why Jane is not so good as we could wish."

Mrs. Cobb had indeed taken no pains with her niece's moral education; nevertheless, in a certain way she really loved her, and on learning that she was dangerously ill, she insisted she should be brought to her house to be nursed there. Mr. Ainsworth himself superintended the sick girl's removal, which she bore better than might have been expected; but late on the evening of the following day she was seized with an alarming attack in her chest, and at eleven o'clock Mrs. Cobb came running into her lodger's room, declar-

ing that Jane was dying. Mrs. Dale and her daughter were sitting up to finish some work, and the former immediately said she would go at once and fetch Mr. Ainsworth. "You, Alice," she added, as she hastily tied her bonnet strings, "wouldn't mind sitting with Mrs. Cobb the while. She doesn't like to be left alone with that poor creature."

"Mother, I don't want to do anything for Jane. She's a wicked girl. Do you know, she told me this afternoon, she took the sovereign you—we—lost. She found it lying under the kitchen dresser, she said, near where you must have been standing when it dropped out of the bag. Wasn't it shocking of her to take it?"

"Very shocking, indeed. But you know we ought to help even bad people when they want our help."

"Yes, but to take our money was so very bad. Still it's only being revengeful, perhaps, not to go to her. Is it, mother?"

Mrs. Dale could not stay to discuss the point; but Alice's better feelings prevailed,

and, as soon as her mother was gone, she stole into the sick-room, and took her station there. Jane's alarming seizure gradually subsided, and her aunt began to doze a little in her chair; but Alice sat wide awake and bolt upright by the bed-side, wishing she might venture to rise and snuff the candle, which was sputtering and flickering, and casting strange shadows upon the wall. "Jane," she said at length, speaking in a low whisper, "Jane."

"Well," returned the sick girl, faintly.

"I thought you might like to know I forgave you about the sovereign. I do quite, now. I was wrong before when I said I wouldn't."

"I'm glad you do," said Jane. "And, indeed, when I took it, I quite meant to make it up to you. I wanted money very bad, and thought I should have had time."

At this moment Mrs. Cobb started up from her sleep. "I declare I was dozing," she cried. "What a time your mother is gone, Alice. Why, there's the sound of bells, isn't

there? Yes, I thought I couldn't be dreaming. Twelve o'clock must have struck, and they're ringing in the new year."

"Oh, I forgot all about that," said Alice. "But how pretty the bells sound."

She stole to the window and peeped out.

Everything looked just as usual; the stars were shining brightly in the sky as she had seen them shine the night before, and as they had shone for centuries and centuries ere she was born. But though there was nothing in outward nature to show her that another year had passed away, she knew that it *was* gone, nevertheless, and that its pleasures and pains, its opportunities, too, of usefulness and improvement, would never, never come again!

Soon after midnight Mrs. Dale returned, bringing the doctor with her, and Alice escaped from the sick-room to go, as her mother supposed, to bed. About half an hour later, however, as Mr. Ainsworth was descending the stairs, followed by Mrs. Dale, he caught the sound of a smothered sob, and asked from whence it came.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," said Mrs. Dale. "Why (pushing open her room door, which was standing ajar,) it's my little girl! My dear, whatever is the matter?"

"She's somewhat too young to be a night nurse, and she is tired and excited, poor thing," said the doctor, kindly.

"Do tell me what's the matter," urged her mother. "What! (as Alice whispered something in her ear) crying 'cause the year's gone. Well, that is silly, child."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Ainsworth, "your good little girl may think she has let the year slip by without profiting by it as she ought. Ah! I thought that was it. Well, cheer up, my dear; we've all need to feel sorry, like you; but ——"

"I'm sure," interrupted simple Mrs. Dale, "she's a very good child, so I can't think what has put such fancies into her head. I think she's fretting partly about Jane."

"Yes, partly, mother. I thought how shocking it would be for her to have put off being good, if she dies!"

“Poor Jane,” said the doctor. “We can’t judge her. She may have been badly brought up, and have had more temptations to contend with than we know of. We must leave her to One who judges far more justly and mercifully than we can judge one another. But it is very shocking to put off being good ; for the longer we delay the harder we shall find it to become good in the end. Now, good night, or rather good morning. I wish both you and your mother a happy New Year.”

“A happy new year.” Before that new year was many days old, Jane Cobb had died. Had she taken care of her health in time, Mr. Ainsworth said that, humanly speaking, he could without difficulty have subdued the disease ; but her obstinacy had rendered his skill unavailing. It was a very sad case altogether, for it was to be feared she had put off higher matters to a “convenient season.” She died, however, truly penitent, and sincerely grateful to those who had returned good for evil.

Mrs. Dale and her daughter were fully reinstated into the house agent's favour; and, through the kind recommendations of Miss Ainsworth, were so plentifully supplied with work, that (soon after their removal from lodgings into an empty house) they were rejoined by the old clock and pembroke table, and these articles of furniture never found their way to the pawnbroker's again. Alice does not yet like making button-holes; but whenever she is tempted to delay the fulfilment of any of her duties, small as well as great, she calls to mind the words, "*Now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation."

XV.

LENDING A HALF-CROWN.

ARTHUR JOHNSON had a half-crown which he wished to give to a poor woman. His father gave it to him for watching sheep ; and told him he must not spend it, but put it out at interest, or trade with it so as to make something by it. He knew his father would not let him give it away ; for he was not a true Christian, and thought of little else than of making and saving money. Arthur's mother died when he was an infant, but with her last breath she gave him to God.

When Arthur was five years old, he was sent to school to a pious teacher, who cared for his soul ; and knowing that he had no teacher at home, she took unusual pains to instruct him in the principles of religious truth. The Holy Spirit blessed her efforts ;

and, before he was eight years of age, there was reason to hope that he had been born again of God.

Arthur was now in his tenth year. He considered how he could help a poor widow; and at length he hit upon the plan which proved successful.

His father was very desirous that he should begin to act for himself in business matters, such as making bargains. He did not wish him to ask his advice in so doing, but to go by his own judgment. After the business was done, he would show whether it was wise or not, but never censured him, lest he should discourage him from acting on his own responsibility.

In view of these facts, Arthur formed his plan.

“Father, may I lend my half-crown?”

“To some spendthrift boy?”

“I won’t lend it without good security.”

The father was pleased that the son had the idea of good security in his head; he would not inquire what it was, for he wished

Arthur to decide for himself. He told him to lend it, but be careful not to lose it.

“I’ll be sure about that,” said Arthur.

Arthur took his half-crown and ran to the poor widow, and gave it to her before she had time to thank him.

At night his father asked him if he had put out his money.

“Yes, sir,” said Arthur.

“Whom did you lend it to?”

“I gave it to a poor starving widow, in one of Mr. Harvey’s houses.”

There was a frown gathering on his father’s brow as he said, “Do you call that lending? Did you not ask my permission to lend it? Have I a son that will deceive me?”

“No, sir,” said Arthur; “I did lend it.”

He opened his Bible, that he had ready, with his finger on the place: “‘He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth to the Lord.’ I lent it to the Lord, and I call that written promise good security.”

“Lent it to the Lord! Will he ever pay you?”

“Yes, father, he will ; it says that he will pay me again.”

“I thought you had more sense,” said his father. But this was not said in an angry tone. The truth was, the old man was pleased with the ingenuity, as he called it, of the boy. He did not wish to discourage that, so he took out his purse and handed Arthur another half-crown. “Here ! the Lord will never pay you ; I must, or you will never see your money again.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Arthur. “Well,” said he to himself, “the Lord has paid me—much sooner than I expected, too. I hardly expected he would pay me in money. The hearts of all men are in his hand, and the gold and silver are his ; he has disposed my father to pay it to me. I’ll lend again to the Lord.”

He did. But he always did one thing first. He always thought about what he was going to do, and prayed the Lord to direct him. When his father saw that he did not part with his money in buying things that

were of little or no use, or lend it to a spend-thrift boy, but used it either in buying good books for himself, or in relieving those that were in real distress, he said no more to him, but began to think that Arthur would grow up to be a wiser and better man than he had been.

XVI.

STORY OF A VIOLET.

IT was a pretty spot that grassy dingle, near the old ivy-grown farm-house. The trees spread their branches wide overhead, the wild rose and woodbine climbed amongst the hazel bushes, and threw their long sweeping garlands across the silver tinkling brook that flowed beneath over smooth pebbles.

There during the spring and summer grew the sweetest and loveliest wild flowers. Primroses, bluebells, wood-anemones, pink campion, and the gleaming starwort in spring; meadow-sweet, orchises, fox-glove, and many others in summer. But down in a mossy hollow, sheltered from the cutting wind, grew and flowered earlier than anywhere else, the sweetest and most beautiful purple and white violets. Large clusters lifted up their mod-

est heads to greet the cheering rays of the still wintry sun, as they shone through the branches overhead.

But while the flowers strove to meet the friendly warmth, one among them shrank under the shelter of her green leaves, dreading all observation. She was smaller than the rest of her sisters, and her petals, instead of being dazzling white like theirs, were tinged with purple at the tips.

“Alas!” said she to herself, sighing under her green shelter, “what a poor, little, ugly thing I am,—of what use am I in the world? What pleasure will I ever give, nobody will ever care to look at me.”

Just then a robin flew down to drink at the brook, close to the nook where the flowers grew.

“Ah!” said he, putting his head on one side and giving it a shake, “what a sweet scent there is here! I wonder what it is!” He gave two hops, then seeing the flowers, he cried, fluttering his wings, “Oh! it’s my old friends the violets. Welcome back again,

sweet friends, you quite revive one's heart, for one is always sure when you appear that spring is come again ; I must go and tell my relations, that they may collect materials for building their nests!"

So saying he gave several little nods, two or three skips with his legs very wide apart, fluttered his wings, and flew away.

" Ah ! well," said the little violet, " perhaps all people do not care for beauty. The robin likes us for our perfume, and he did not seem to care for our looks ; now I can give out as sweet a scent as any of my sisters. I will try."

So she again lifted up her head, and peeped forth from under her green leaves that the sun might bring forth her odours. The warmth revived her, and she felt a glow of delight as, at the same time, her stem grew taller and she became a finer flower.

Directly some merry children from the farm-house came running down the slope to the brook with little baskets in their hands.

" Let us look for sweet violets," they said,

“in the place where we found so many last year.”

They came towards the hollow, and shouted for joy as the sweet perfume greeted them, and they saw the ground spotted over with the white and purple tufts.

“Oh, the pretty violets!” they cried, “and what a number of them.” They knelt down on the grass, and before long had gathered all the flowers that were blown, both white and purple; then they tied them up in bunches, and, when they had finished, carried them home joyfully to their mother, who put them in a basket with damp moss and sent them to market.

It was a scene very different from the green dingle which the little violet saw when she was taken from the basket. All was noise and confusion; everything seemed moving, and there was not a single green spot to be seen except some cabbages and herbs near her; the very air was thick and musty.

“Six bunches in all,” said the woman who had taken the flowers from her basket; “go

now and sell them while they are fresh, and we shall get a good price for them," she continued, giving them to her daughter.

The poor little violet hardly knew anything that passed until she found herself in the hand of a lady who had bought the bunch in which she was. It was very uncomfortable being carried so, the motion shook the flowers, and knocked them against one another. Suddenly they all fell to the ground. The lady stooped to pick them up, but our poor violet, who, on account of her shorter stem, was not tied so securely as the rest, got separated.

"See, mamma, here is one that has come loose," cried a little girl that ran by the lady's side.

"Never mind that, it is ugly and small," she replied. The child threw it down on the pavement, and they passed on.

The poor flower felt very unhappy lying there on the cold stones, the chill wind blowing on her, and expecting every moment to be trodden under foot by the passers by.

How sad a change it was, she thought; how different from the warm sunny dingle where she was surrounded by all her dear companions and sheltered under the green leaves, and no sound was heard but the singing of the birds, the rippling of the stream, and the rustling of the wind among the trees overhead. And now she must die unheeded, she was too insignificant for any one to see her there, too ugly for any one to love.

But no! Just then a young girl passing, caught sight of the flower, and eagerly stooped to pick it up, exclaiming joyfully, "Oh, what a beautiful violet!" She caressed it tenderly, enjoying its fragrance, and carefully protecting it from the wind, carried it home and placed it in a little glass of water in the window. Again and again during the day she left her work for a moment to bend over the violet, enjoying its sweet scent, and the remembrances it called up of pleasant country lanes, fields, and singing birds. Her poor dark home had few objects of beauty in it, and this little flower was precious there.

Now, at length, the poor violet was truly happy, she was of some use in the world, some one loved her. She gratefully opened out her petals, and breathed forth her sweetest perfume till evening, and then slowly drooped her head and died.

Thus can even a single small flower give pleasure to many hearts, though some are apt to pass them by unnoticed. So even a little child, by being obliging and kind to its companions, may do a great deal towards making those about it happy. Let none think that because they are so young and know so little, that they can do no good ; let all try to do their best, in any way they can, towards making others happy, and so they may win the esteem and love of all, whatever be their station, or age, or talent.

XVII.

BELIEVING, BUT NOT UNDERSTANDING.

“I WILL not believe anything but what I understand,” said a self-confident young man in a hotel one day.

“Nor will I,” said another.

“Neither will I,” chimed in a third.

“Gentlemen,” said one well known to me, who was on a journey, and who sat close by, “do I understand you correctly, that you will not believe any thing that you don’t understand?”

“I will not,” said one, and so said each one of the trio.

“Well,” said the stranger, “in my ride this morning I saw some geese in a field eating grass; do you believe that?”

“Certainly,” said the three unbelievers.

“I also saw the pigs eating grass; do you believe that?”

“Of course,” said the three.

“And I also saw sheep and cows eating grass; do you believe that?”

“Of course,” was again replied.

“Well, but the grass which they had formerly eaten had, by digestion, turned to feathers on the backs of the geese, to bristles on the back of the swine, to wool on the sheep, and on the cows it had turned to hair; do you believe that, gentlemen?”

“Certainly,” they replied.

“Yes, you *believe it*,” he rejoined, “BUT DO YOU UNDERSTAND IT?”

They were confounded and silent, and evidently ashamed, as they well might be.

THE END.





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